Collaborative museum-making
an analysis of collective memory about Jews and the Museum on Wheels in rural Poland (2014-2017)

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Collaborative museum-making: an analysis of collective memory about Jews and the *Museum on Wheels* in rural Poland (2014-2017).

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Figure 1: *Museum on Wheels* pavilion in Radzyń Podlaski, August 2014. Photo taken by Zosia Biernacka for the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Downloaded from the Facebook page of *MoW* and used with the permission of the museum.

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Abstract

On the whole, museum studies have so far paid very little attention to collaboration in the museum sector. If at all, this topic has been studied using examples of the collaborative making of exhibitions. The thesis rectifies this gap by revealing the importance of the diverse needs, expectations and interests of various actors in collaboratively made travelling museums. In particular, by combining insights from museum studies and memory studies, it draws attention to the involvement of visitors, activists and other actors who engage in collaborative museum-making of itinerant museum projects. A qualitative study of a travelling initiative of Warsaw's POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, *Museum on Wheels (MoW),* run in rural Poland as a collaboration between the museum and local communities, is analysed as a case study. Using the case study of *MoW,* it is demonstrated that studying collective memory on the vernacular level can shed light not only on the contributions of community actors to shaping an itinerant museum project, but also reveal how collective memory narratives are (re)produced by individuals in institutionally provided contexts. This thesis claims that a tension between different stories, needs, expectations and interests – of either the museum or the locals - defined how the process of collaborative museum-making worked. The findings suggest that the contributions of locals which were in line with the museum's narratives about Polish history, and with the institution's goals of becoming a responsive and well-attended museum, were the most valuable from POLIN's perspective. At the same time, the museum's engagement with the complexity of locals' contributions, including visitors and local activists, was insufficient. Overall, this study sheds new light on museums' outreach, and it invites a reconsideration of how museums engage with difficult memory, such as that of the Holocaust. Furthermore, because of its focus on rural Poland, it also offers unique insight into the vernacular level of collective memory of Jewish/Polish past in post-communist Poland.

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Unless otherwise stated, all photos were taken by the author.

PREFACE *Museum on Wheels* and my research journey

I first found out about *Museum on Wheels* in late spring 2014, when Museum of the History of Polish Jews (without 'POLIN' as part of its name yet) was recruiting educators to join its very first travelling exhibition tour in the summer and autumn of 2014. Back then, I thought that the idea of an itinerant outreach initiative was a very valuable and fascinating one. Today, I still think this is a great idea with much potential. But through my engagement in the project, which lasted three years, I gradually developed a more complex and multi-layered understanding of *Museum on Wheels* (*MoW*) and of how it transforms the communities it reaches out to. This preface is a reflection on my intellectual journey which began in 2014, when I first engaged with *MoW* as an educator, until now, the period of writing up my doctoral thesis which explores *Museum on Wheels* in the framework of new museology and memory studies.

In 2014, I worked on a short-term basis in three towns in North-East Poland: Mława, Olsztyn and Supraśl. I applied to take on this role because my profile matched with the requirements for the position: I had an interest and passion for exploring neglected stories about Jews and other minorities in Poland, I had some experience in guiding or facilitating workshops with groups of various ages, and I had knowledge of Jewish culture and history in Eastern Europe, which I had gained in the academic setting of a Jewish studies specialisation during my Master's programme at CEU in Budapest, and a fellowship in the Center for Jewish History in NYC. I had not previously worked with the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, so my awareness and knowledge about their programmes and approach was limited, but I hoped to learn more through *MoW*. I remember being very anxious about this job, not just because it was a new institution, which meant new people and a new professional challenge, but also because I had not received much instruction on what and how I was expected to communicate as an educator. I knew that the key element of the

travelling project was the pavilion, I knew that together with another educator I was supposed to run two workshops for students at local schools, and I was aware that some local events had been planned by local activists, but I did not know much more than that.

Prior to arriving in Mława, I tried to prepare by reading about the town and its past and familiarizing myself with the materials I had received from the Museum of the History of Polish Jews to co-facilitate the workshops. Yet, there was little instruction given to me from the side of *MoW*'s staff on what story, or stories, they wanted me to offer to the locals visiting the pavilion. On one hand, this could be seen as an advantage: I could interpret and use what was in the pavilion in whatever way I deemed suitable for interacting with a local audience. On the other hand, though, it left me quite puzzled in terms of what the museum was trying to achieve with this project: provide a safe space to talk about difficult topics related to Jews? Encourage an exploration of the former local Jewish community? Showcase the work and plans of the museum? I remember that in my role as an educator I learned a lot from others – educators working with me as well as locals who came to share their memories or thoughts on the past and present life in their town or area.

From the materials in the pavilion (especially on the 'workshop table' for children) and interactions with other educators as well as the staff of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, I realised that educators were expected to be very knowledgeable about Jewish culture and traditions, whereas my own strengths lay in the broader history of Jews in Poland and Eastern Europe. I quickly tried to learn the details and stories of Jewish holidays, symbols, and religious traditions which I could then recount to younger and older visitors of the pavilion. When I now try to remember some of what I was telling the visitors back then I find it hard to recall the details. I do not mean the particular encounters, because surely the details of those are malleable and fleeting memory experiences, but rather the knowledge which I was expected to accumulate and use to interact with the locals. This makes me

wonder what these children, young people and adults from small towns where I went with the museum learned and remembered from the stories that I attempted to convey to them about Jewish traditions and holidays.

While the above is connected to the broader questions of pedagogy and learning, here I am thinking about the personal, affective connection with the stories they heard, and I told. Perhaps one question to ask would be whether I was a good storyteller, if I did not feel that what I talked about was closely connected to my lived, embodied knowledge about Jews? Following Walter Benjamin: "the storyteller takes what he tells from experiences – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (2006, 364). I know that every educator who participated in the project joined in with their own story, background and experience, and after following *Museum on Wheels* in other roles later on I realised that perhaps my lived experience and background were among those least affectively connected with Jewish culture and traditions. I have some Jewish friends, I knew something about Judaism and Jewish culture and participated in a Shabbat dinner two or three times, but there was not much more than that. But that still leaves me with a question: even if other educators were better storytellers than me and had more personal links to draw on, how were the interactions with them experienced by locals?

Through the brief, yet diverse - because every town has its own stories, specificities, taboos; experiences as an educator, I became increasingly curious about *Museum on Wheels* as an outreach project. I was particularly keen to find out how the locals of all these small towns and villages around Poland engaged with *MoW* as it made its short three-day visits. Then, in the winter of 2014/2015, I developed a PhD research proposal together with Professor Anna Reading of King's College London to work on a doctoral thesis which would explore travelling projects about minorities in Europe. Around the same period, I managed to get a temporary job with POLIN Museum for the Spring and Summer as a researcher and

oral history interviewer for the *Museum on Wheels*' 2015 tour. It was not clear at that point whether such a tour would be repeated the following year, as the coordinators of *MoW* at POLIN Museum were not sure for how long the EEA and Norway Grants funding would continue covering the project. Thus, I considered myself very fortunate to be able to join the travelling museum in 2015 for three months, as this may well have been the last chance to spend such a substantial amount of time gathering fieldwork data on that particular project. In the meantime, I received good news about the funding for my PhD research from the London Arts and Humanities Partnership (to begin in September 2015), and with the help and support of Professor Reading I applied for and received the ethics approval needed to conduct fieldwork in 2015.

I started in the Spring of 2015 by participating in the training for local coordinators, which was held at POLIN Museum in Warsaw: more than 30 local activists from the towns that were to be visited that year attended this two-day event. I introduced myself to everyone and told them what my role would be: observing what is going on, conducting interviews with local actors and educators, as well as gathering any stories that locals wanted to have recorded and passing them on to POLIN Museum. I was also responsible for conducting seven audio-recorded oral history interviews throughout the time I was travelling with *Museum on Wheels*, which would then be used by the Virtual Shtetl on-line archive, administered by staff based at POLIN Museum. My role also included preparing summary reports for POLIN Museum from each town we visited and submitting a final report on the whole tour. The individual reports were to discuss the specificities of each town and village, describe the local events organised by activists, the local audience which engaged with the museum together with their motivations and opinions about the project, as well as explore how local activists and educators evaluated the visit and the collaboration with POLIN Museum. The concluding report was to provide a summary of overall trends and

characteristics of local events, audiences, and evaluations of the project by visitors, educators and local activists. The methods I was to use included participant and non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews as well as questionnaires.

I travelled with *MoW* from May 2015 until the end of July 2015, taking two or three days off in the first two months, and three weeks in July, replaced by another researcher hired by POLIN Museum. The museum, together with the staff, changed the location every four days and the constant movement and mobility involved in the nature of the work was exhausting. In every town, we worked with new local activists and interacted with new visitors. I kept a fieldwork journal in which I recorded my experiences in each town, writing about the encounters I had and what I observed during local accompanying events or interactions in the *MoW* pavilion. I was aware that I lacked substantive methodological preparation, but I tried to rely on the experience and knowledge I gained during my master's degree, and often referred to Professor Reading regarding any major issues that arose over Skype and e-mail.

Working as a researcher for POLIN Museum gave me a unique insight into the institution and especially into *Museum on Wheels*, which then became the only travelling project that I focused on in my thesis. However, working as a researcher for POLIN and collecting my own data at the same time was a tricky and challenging position to be in. I was on the one hand part of POLIN's team, and my task was to research how the project is received, serving as an intermediary between the local communities and the Virtual Shtetl. On the other, I had to remain aware that the data I was gathering required a further in-depth analysis which I was planning to carry out over the course of my PhD. Having August and September to write a summary report for POLIN Museum was certainly not enough time to arrive at many profound conclusions about *MoW*. I knew that for me this was going to be a long process and only now, writing up the thesis three years later, do I begin to feel confident

drawing conclusions from the data I started gathering in 2015. In the concluding report which I submitted to POLIN Museum in 2015, I focused on identifying and summarizing the main trends related to local events, audiences, and the perspectives of local activists who became involved and educators who worked in visited towns. In the report and its subsequent presentation, delivered in April 2016 at POLIN Museum during a conference concluding *MoW* tour of 2015, I was not confident enough with the analysis of the data I had collected to provide an in-depth analysis of *MoW* and its reception.

In contrast to an evaluation study which POLIN Museum commissioned to an external research studio in Warsaw in 2014, where the researcher conducted focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews few months after the tour of *MoW* has finished, my reports did not offer recommendations and a summary of main findings of the research. In a way, I wish I had been able to offer an in-depth analysis of the project, its limitations and opportunities, as well as recommendations, but I know I did the best I could at the time. I am also aware that the staff at POLIN was interested in an in-depth evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of the project, and if I had provided them with one it might have contributed to shaping the following tours of the project. *MoW* eventually received further funding and travelled again in 2016, 2017 and 2018 for a few months each year. Yet, at the same time I do know that the process of working on my PhD, thus also analysing the data gathered in 2015, required time for analysis, reflection and writing. The effect of the few years' work is, eventually, not an evaluation of *Museum on Wheels* but rather an examination of the complexity of collaboration in the museum sector as well an analysis of the processes of dealing with difficult topics in collective memory, and an examination of contemporary memory politics in Poland. *Museum on Wheels* is a case through which I explore various questions related to memory, museums, agency and education, and I hope that my findings can find relevance in museum studies and memory studies more broadly.

The strong feelings I have towards my role in *Museum on Wheels* are to a large extent rooted in my conviction that this is a valuable project which offers a lot of potential for advancing the discussions on difficult memory about Jews in Poland. I agree with what one of my respondents said in 2015 about the importance of dealing with the past: "Who we are now and who we will be is formed by the memory of who we were, (...), and this is both the memory about what happened here, what was good, and what was bad." (Interviewee Y, Male, Pińczów, 01.07.2015). My interest in narratives about Jews - which are often neglected in stories about local past in Poland, especially in small towns and villages, but in many larger urban centres alike -, began a few months after I turned 17. In December 2007, I participated in an international youth meeting in Egypt called Peace Camp, where I met people from around the World. As a teenager, I was extremely keen to learn about other countries and cultures, to study languages, and what I most enjoyed was travelling and meeting people from abroad.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, after the collapse of communism which I describe in the Introduction, it became more affordable and reachable for Polish families and young people to learn languages, travel around Europe, and participate in various programs abroad. Particularly, as Poland joined the EU, the opportunities I and my peers had broadened extensively. I was also very fortunate that my parents were very supportive, especially my mother, who invested a lot of effort, and any money she had, into helping me to develop these passions: she took me to extra language classes, sent me to short summer trips to other European countries, and covered my fees in an international school so I could follow an IB programme in English. I looked out for opportunities to attend any funded or affordable international youth projects and I participated in many: youth exchanges funded by the EU, Model United Nations sessions in various cities in Poland, youth forums and meetings funded by People to People International. Peace Camp was one of said international youth

meetings: a prestigious 10-day programme in Egypt for which People to People International funded 50 young people from around the world to represent their countries. There were 10 or 12 Europeans on the programme, and I was very proud to be there, albeit extremely anxious about speaking English for such an extended period of time when there was nobody around who spoke my mother tongue, Polish. Yet, in the end, the openness, enthusiasm and kindness of other participants and the team leaders made the communication and the whole experience not only enjoyable, but also fascinating and inspiring.

Among the people I became friends with were two Israeli teenagers, who had both already visited Poland at least once. In their stories from these trips, the image they painted of the country I came from was of grey, hostile and uninteresting land with much antisemitism[1]. I opposed their descriptions sturdily, being genuinely amazed about all the hostility and ugliness they were describing. Of course, I thought my country was beautiful (or at least some parts of it), and I did not know anyone openly demonstrating an antisemitic attitude. Yes, I knew that everywhere there are people hostile to strangers, or hostile to particular groups that they have prejudices against, but I did not understand why and how it was possible that my friends had an image of Poland which was so negative. After coming back home to southern Poland, a village in Upper Silesia located less than 15 kilometres from Oświęcim/Auschwitz, I decided to find out more about antisemitism in Poland. I also wanted to know more about the trips that my two Israeli friends took to Poland, which, as they told me, was part of a programme supported by the Israeli Ministry of Education. Finally, I wanted to bring my Israeli friends and their peers to Poland for an exchange with students at my high school in order to change their perspective on Poles at least a little. The last idea I had was never implemented because although my school in Katowice was

[1]This thesis uses the term 'antisemitism' and not 'anti-Semitism' because the latter implies the existence of a distinct, constructed group, 'Semites'. Antisemitism defines "a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities" (European Parliament Working Group on Antisemitism, n.d.).

enthusiastic about the idea and we were developing the plan and schedule of such trip with my Israeli friend, eventually he informed me that his school did not want to participate. Unfortunately, I do not remember the explanation the school offered to him.

My interest in antisemitism and Israeli youth trips to Poland slowly expanded into an exploration of education about the Holocaust in Poland, Israeli-Jewish history in Poland, and Israeli history. Although my hometown is located just 30 minutes away by car or train from Oświęcim/Auschwitz, it did not really mean that I had learned a lot about the Holocaust at home or in my local primary and secondary school. As a child, I remember visiting the town of Oświęcim regularly because my mother used to work as a pharmacist there, but to me it was just a town like any other in the area. Maybe apart from occasional stories about impossibly long traffic jams because of some official visits or anniversaries at the Auschwitz Museum, as a consequence of which my mother could not get to work on time or would arrive home late. When I was 15, we went to the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum for a guided tour with my school as it was part of the curriculum at that time. I cannot recall any particular preparation being offered, nor any reflexive discussions with our teachers afterwards. I just remember that my classmates and I were extremely upset and moved, the atmosphere in the bus back was very depressing and we did not talk much on the way back. After the meeting with the Israelis in Egypt, when my interest in Jewish past in Poland emerged, I realised that in post-communist Poland the key narrative we were learning about in history and literature classes was about virtuous, suffering yet heroic Poles who were almost all Roman Catholic. I also learned at school and at home about Silesian culture and regional identity because I grew up in Upper Silesia, a historical border region of Polish, Prussian and Czech territories. Yet, Jews were not very much part of the picture, apart from being mentioned as the Holocaust victims during World War Two (WW2).

In the late 2000s I taught myself many things that were never discussed at school or at home: about the Jews that had for centuries lived on Polish territories, about the Holocaust, about Jews in Poland after the Holocaust, and about what it means to work through difficult memory. I concluded that antisemitism is an important element of the story, but I still did not agree and do not agree to situate it at the centre of the understanding of Jewish past and present in Poland. In post-communist Poland, discussions about the Holocaust and memory about Jews and Jewish heritage accelerated in the public sphere after Jan Gross' book "Neighbours. The destruction of the Jewish community in Jedwabne" was published in 2001. As a result, various individuals, NGOs, cultural and academic institutions as well as museums since the 1990s have in various ways advanced the understanding and awareness of the Jewish past in both small and large towns around Poland, as I explain in Chapter Two. The travelling initiative of POLIN Museum is part of these developments, and although I observed most of them from abroad as I moved out of Poland at the age of 19, I am very glad I could study it in detail to write this thesis.

During my own journey since I moved away from Poland almost 10 years ago, I realised, through my studies and professional projects, but also through my personal experience, how mobility influences our perspectives. I sometimes wonder how I would have approached the *Museum on Wheels* if it visited my town when I was a teenager. Or what I would think about it if instead of leaving Poland and my hometown to begin studies abroad in the UK, I had stayed in the place where I grew up. For some people in these many towns that *MoW* visited, the interaction with the museum that comes to them while they are not able to travel to the museum themselves, was an opportunity to interact with different stories and new people, and this may lead to a change in how they see themselves and the place where they live. So much of it is about belonging: for me doing this PhD was a way to better understand where I come from and what shaped me and other people around me in my home

country. For many of the visitors or local activists, interactions with the travelling museum were about negotiating belonging: to their town, or to local or national communities.

In this thesis, I explore *MoW* as a project which invited inhabitants of small towns to join the collaborative museum-making, and by doing this I am also in some sense collaborating with *MoW,* and everyone who interacted with it, in constructing a story about this travelling museum. I want to better understand how it fit in with local needs, institutional agendas of POLIN Museum, collective memory narratives about Jews in Poland, and finally, how collaboration between various actors shaped it. Because my study is framed by social constructivist epistemology, I see my experiences as a researcher tightly linked to the knowledge I am generating (Guba and Lincoln 1994), and therefore, the story of my own journey to this research and over the course this research, which I have described in this preface, is highly relevant for recognising how my background, interests and position as a researcher and a young Polish female living abroad, contributed to what I examine and how I carry out my analysis.

INTRODUCTION

In public discourse, memory, defined in an array of different ways, is being instrumentalised and performed to re-produce identities, enunciate interests and justify policies. Museums occupy a crucial role in this process, presenting themselves as one of the vital social institutions responsible for "transforming living memory into institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices which enact and give substance to group identities and foster memory communities" (Arnold-de Simine 2013, 1–2). In the museum landscape, projects that seek to encourage participation using multiple media and modes of interaction are highly valued (N. Simon 2010, ii). This thesis examines one such project, *Museum on Wheels (MoW),* an itinerant museum organized to provide education about the Jewish past in Poland and empower audiences and local activists to take initiatives to include former Jewish inhabitants into local memory in villages and small-town communities in Poland (POLIN 2018a). Talking about Jews can be a challenging and controversial task in Poland (Janicka 2015a; Kapralski 2011; Tokarska-Bakir 2013), and *MoW*, deliberately or not, has evoked difficult memory about the Polish/Jewish past in the rural areas to which it travelled. This thesis explores how the encounters with this difficult memory contributed to the collaborative making of *Museum on Wheels,* a process in which the museum's staff, local activists and visitors were involved. I particularly focus on visitors and other local actors who engaged with the project, and through this explore collective memory on the vernacular level. In this Introduction I situate *Museum on Wheels* in the context of other travelling museums which have been touring around Europe and the world. I also provide a rationale for this thesis and explain its significance, in the context of existing research on collective memory, museums' outreach and collaboration. I then present my research questions and outline the structure of the thesis.

MoW is run by POLIN Museum of History of Polish Jews (POLIN or POLIN Museum) and it incorporates an interactive travelling exhibition in a pavilion of 35 square meters, with workshops and cultural events co-organized with local activists in small towns and villages across Poland (POLIN Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich 2017, 36–39). The touring of *MoW* began in 2014, and until 2017 the project was funded by EEA Grants and Norway Grants as part of the Jewish Cultural Heritage Project[2]. In that period, it visited 72 towns and villages as well as festivals across Poland, staying in each place for three days (POLIN Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich 2017, 36–39). Since 2017 the itinerant museum still travels to a few towns per year, but it is covered by funding from other organisations, such as the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland and the Koret Foundation (POLIN 2018a).

Since 2014 until the time of writing (2018-2019), some elements of the exhibition, the accompanying workshops, events, and exhibitions on offer, as well as how *MoW* visits were collaboratively planned with local activists, evolved from year to year. The thesis, however, focuses on the period funded solely by EEA and Norway Grants (2014-2017), and most data originates from 2015 with some from 2014, 2016 and 2017. My aim is not to conclude with findings which exhaustively describe and analyse *MoW*, even in the period I concentrate on, but rather to identify some of the mechanisms which influence a process of evoking difficult memory collaboratively in a museum outreach project, using *MoW* and the Polish context as a case study.

1.2 Engaging with difficult topics in travelling exhibitions

Memory as past in the present (Terdiman 1993) emerges in interactions between social and individual levels (Erll 2011a, Olick 2008). The mobilities of people, objects, ideas and

[2]The EEA and Norway Grants are a contribution of Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway towards 'reducing economic and social disparities and to strengthening bilateral relations with 16 EU countries in Central and Southern Europe and the Baltics' (EEA Grants-Norway Grants 2017).

capital go hand in hand with numerous processes related to memories: their mobilisation, circulation, distribution, reception, vanishing, repression or forgetting. Since the last decades of the 20th century there has been a heightened interest in the processes of memory on a societal level in social sciences and humanities (Huyssen 2012, Nora 1989, Young 1993) and, especially beginning in the 1990s, also in connection to mobilities of people, data, objects, ideas and capital (Erll 2011a; Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, Reading 2009; Rigney 2005). This has occurred in the framework of technological advancements influencing travel, communication, self-expression, and other parts of professional life, community activities and political and economic spheres (Brockmeier 2015). In the present-day world, however, globalization and digitization are unevenly distributed (Reading 2011) and so is the access to and capacity for mobility. Mobilities are defined here as various forms of transport, embodied movement and communication involving people, objects and data. Studying mobilities includes considerations of the infrastructures, or lack of thereof, which enable individuals, things and data to move, or which keep them static (Urry 2007).

Travelling exhibitions which tour different places, either in one country or internationally, enable museums to address issues of human mobility. This is often about responding to immobility by widening access and reaching out to individuals and communities unable to travel to the museum, but it can also be to encourage mobility: inviting people to visit the institution's main location or engage in activities, projects, and events run by the museum. Travelling exhibitions are an example of how, following the premises 'new museology' (Vergo 1989), museums seek to become more audience-oriented and democratically run institutions incorporating a plurality of political, social and cultural voices (N. Simon 2010, Zapata, Simonetta and Mansilla 2013).

The phenomenon of itinerant museums and exhibitions is not new: according to a UNESCO's "Manual of Travelling Exhibitions" published in 1953, the first travelling

exhibitions were organised by the Victoria and Albert Museum in the 19th century and since 1945 exhibitions that travel have been popular all over the world (Courter Osborn 1953, II). For instance, in the 1950s the Smithsonian Institution in Washington created its Travelling Exhibition Service (Smithsonian Institution Travelling Exhibition Service 2017), and in the 1960s a national body for designing and managing travelling exhibitions was launched in Sweden (Hjorth 1994). From 1990s onwards, however, the rapid and uneven developments in infrastructures and digital media - paired with the changes in the museum sector whereby institutions seek to become more inclusive, democratic and socially relevant (Crooke 2011; Ross 2004; N. Simon 2010) – contributed to a substantial increase in popularity of itinerant exhibitions and travelling museum programmes. For instance, Ecsite, a network which gathers more than 350 science museums and other organisations engaging audiences with science worldwide, runs an online marketplace listing almost 400 scientific exhibitions available for rent in September 2019 (Ecsite 2019). This thesis focuses, however, on those exhibitions that require only a small or no financial contribution from a hosting organisation or community, of which there are also many examples.

An international exhibition "Anne Frank House – a history for today" has visited locations all around the world and is shown more than 300 times a year (Anne Frank House 2019). The tour is coordinated by the Anne Frank House, but partner organisations contribute to organising the local visits (ibid). In the exhibition, the story of Anne Frank is used to present topics around human rights, prejudice and discrimination (Verbraak 2001). Travelling museums can also be organized independently from established museums' programs and structures. Arte por la Memoria is such an independent initiative. It was created in 2009 in Lima, Peru and has since toured around Peru and the USA. It focuses on the recent period of political violence in Peru (1980-2000) and uses art to "sensitise and generate dialogues and connections with diverse memories of political violence and the defence of human rights"

(Arte por la Memoria 2018). In South America many more examples of travelling museums can be found, such as the Itinerant Museum of Memory and Identity of Montes de María ("Museo Itinerante de la Memoria y Identidad de los Montes de María") in Colombia or the Refinery Neighbourhood Mobile Museum ("el Museo Itinerante del Barrio de la Rafinería") in Argentina (Museo Itinerante de la Memoria 2019, Zapata, Simonetta and Mansilla 2013).

For museums which focus on the past, travelling exhibitions and outreach programmes can offer an opportunity to bring new voices and stories into the museums' work and thus can contribute to democratising the museums' narratives or practices. Yet, democratising the production of memory narratives does not necessarily need to be the purpose of such an itinerant project, it may be more about reaching out with the museum's message, encouraging learning about certain topics among new audiences, rather than offering these audiences a chance to contribute. *Museum on Wheels,* this thesis will demonstrate, seeks to do both to some extent: encourage learning about neglected elements of Polish history and invite visitors to share their own stories. There are a number of travelling projects run in Europe and beyond which were created and are or were run with similar purpose. Therefore, to situate *MoW*'s aims and approach to its target audiences, two notable examples of recent travelling exhibitions which connect thematically with *MoW* are discussed below. Like *MoW,* both of these exhibitions approach difficult topics: one by questioning what 'difficultly' is and how it can be represented in museums' work, and the other addressing the Holocaust and resting on the assumption that exposing the horrors of the genocide can help to prevent discrimination, hostility and violence in the present and future.

1.2.1. "Difficult Matters" touring in Sweden

"Difficult Matters: Objects and Narratives that Disturb and Affect", the first example, was run in Sweden in late 1990s and early 2000s by the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions Service[3]. It consisted of a series of seminars for museum workers and academics, a book, and, most importantly for this research, a travelling exhibition which toured Sweden for eight months. The project used "the idea of 'dangerous things and difficult narratives' to animate a collaborative process" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2000, 14). First, curators from museums all over Sweden were invited to select an object they would like to have displayed and write about it, and in this way 54 objects were accumulated. Descriptions that curators wrote of the objects were shown too and these conveyed not only information about the provenance but also explained the curators "own difficulties with the material" (ibid.). For example: "One curator sent the story but not the artefact, a skull. The place where the skull would have been displayed was empty. The curators' dilemmas and responses became part of the object's story." (ibid.). Some objects were there from the start but half of them were added gradually by local museums as the exhibition travelled (Silvén and Bjorklünd 2006, 250). The contributions of the curators "shed light on what is both individually and collectively difficult, and also the span between what is obviously difficult and what seems harmless – for those who know the code" (ibid, 252). The exhibition was accompanied by two travelling curators who gathered over 300 visitors' reflections and reactions during the eight months (ibid.). Difficult matters were used "as an analytical tool for discussing the museums and their work"; from the beginning the task of defining what is 'difficult', challenging, and /or affective rested with both the museum and the visitors of the mobile exhibition (ibid, 251-252).

[3]The Swedish Travelling Exhibitions Service ("Riksutstallingar") is funded by the Swedish government (Hjorth 1994, 100).

In an article reflecting on the project, Eva Silvén and Anders Bjorklünd discuss how difficulty is not only an issue for museums as institutions but also for museum staff as individuals:

> approaching people who are in sorrow or anger, asking people to discuss taboos, traumatic events, and violent emotions with a stranger, to some extent means stepping outside one's professional museum role and instead having a person- to-person encounter, which may be perceived as uncertain and perhaps even threatening. (ibid., 258).

The engagement with 'difficult matters' is something that connects *MoW* and the Swedish travelling project, even if in the Polish case the focus on difficulty was more implicit than explicit, as this thesis shows. Similarly, the emotional, mental and physical challenges in contributing to the itinerant project for the individual: be it the visitor or any member of the museum staff or other person involved, are integral elements of these museum initiatives.

1.2.2. "Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away" on an international tour

More recently, in December 2017, Auschwitz-Birkenau Former German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp State Museum (Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum or Auschwitz-Birkenau), in collaboration with Musealia company from Spain, launched an international travelling exhibition on the history of Auschwitz: "Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away".[4] The first location visited was the Arte Canal Exhibition Centre in Madrid where the exhibition stayed for nine months, until October 2017. In seven consecutive years the exhibition is to visit 14 cities around the world (in Europe and North America); the organisers present the exhibition as "the largest of that kind dedicated to the topic of Auschwitz and the Holocaust in history" (Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau 2017). I

[4] The exhibition was created in partnership between the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and Musealia. In Madrid, school groups got free entry and individual visitors paid around 10 euro per ticket, with an option of adding an audio guide, in Madrid in either English or Spanish, for a small additional fee. Musealia offers institutions that are interested in hosting the exhibition "a flat fee for transportation, installation, design and all the content" but they emphasize that their goal to run this is not to make a lot of profit but "(...) to focus on larger social goals such as enlightenment and education" as the company's director Luis Ferreiro explained to New York Times (Berendt 2017). The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum is to receive a set amount yearly "to cover any expenses arising from the project" and "if the exhibition is profitable, the amount the museum receives will be increased" according to Luis Fereiro (Berendt 2017).

visited the exhibition in Madrid in April 2018 and the size of it (2 500 square meters, 68 rooms), the number of artefacts used (600) as well as the abundance of information, personal accounts, photos, videos and audio files, was to me overwhelming. One needed around three hours to go through all the rooms and these were often crowded – especially during the weekend, but even on a morning weekday there were quite a few visitors, as I observed.

The Director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Dr Piotr M.A. Cywiński, explained the rationale behind this travelling exhibition as follows:

> Today, as in so many countries we feel an alarming increase of antisemitism, racism and xenophobia, the history of Auschwitz is unfortunately taking on a new, meaningful role as a warning for the future (...) Nothing can replace a visit to the authentic site of the biggest crime of the twentieth century, but this exhibition, which people in many countries will have the opportunity to see, can become a great warning cry for us all (Panstwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau 2017).

The Director also connected the need to safeguard human rights and democracy in everyday lives of individuals to the exhibition and its function as a 'warning' (ibid). Defining the aim of a museological project in such terms, as a contribution to building a better future and increasing awareness of individuals about the importance of human rights and democracy, is a common in the framework of new museology (Vergo 1989). Museums assign to themselves a role of active social agents contributing to creating a more open, inclusive and democratic society (Kidd 2014; Macdonald 2011; Simon 2010a). In this, *Museum on Wheels* was similar to the travelling exhibition 'Auschwitz. Not long ago (...)'; *MoW* was also influenced by the concept of the museum as an active social agent in contemporary societies. How this message was constructed for POLIN's project is examined in Chapter Two.

Talking about Jewish history in Poland, including its difficult and painful elements, is, to some extent, another common feature of the Auschwitz exhibition and *MoW*. For one,

the Holocaust[5] and the Auschwitz-Birkenau site are the main focus, and for the other the Holocaust and WW2 were elements which were mentioned in the exhibition and the program but were not made central. Yet, interestingly, the overall aim of making the contents travel was to educate and to promote compassion, empathy and respect for otherness, even if the means for doing that are very different. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum exhibition is enormous, especially in comparison with the 35 square meters' pavilion of *MoW*. The importance assigned to objects and their originality in the promotion of the Auschwitz-Birkenau exhibition, and in the exhibition itself, stands in opposition to the *MoW*'s approach. In POLIN's project artefacts seem 'not to fit' because of space and transport constraints, but also because of how the narrative and aims are constructed.

All in all, the travelling exhibitions I briefly introduced here highlight a number of questions related to collaborative museum-making and difficult pasts. First of all, how curators and other staff involved in running the museum project approached difficulty influenced the position of others who engage in the collaborative process locally. In this thesis I examine how POLIN approached the collaborative memory-making, and difficult memory which was evoked in the process, through the involvement of local activists (Chapter Five). Secondly, the relationship with the local history of the travelling exhibitions mentioned is noteworthy. For the Auschwitz-Birkenau exhibition it is important to reach local audiences in the language that is spoken in the visited city or country as well as international English-speaking tourists, so in Madrid the exhibition was available in English and Spanish. However, in the exhibition itself there was close to nothing on the Civil War

[5]Holocaust was the Nazi genocide of Jews in Europe carried out between 1941 and 1945 in which six million Jews were killed. Some authors prefer to use the term 'Shoah' instead of 'Holocaust' (Gil 2012, Orla-Bukowska 2012). The former originates from Hebrew and signifies "an extreme disaster that emphasizes great ruin" (Gil, 2012, p.86) and the latter comes from Greek and means completely burnt, sacrificed by fire. The term 'Holocaust' is more widely found in the literature and public discussions (Hirsch 1997 and 2012, La Capra 2001, Levy and Sznaider 2006, Rothberg 2009) and I also use it in this thesis.

and WW2 in Spain, the Franco regime, local Jews and the Holocaust.[6] In contrast, the Swedish itinerant exhibition was deliberately created in collaboration with local curators from around the country – they contributed new objects to the display as the truck travelled. Also, the reactions and stories that visitors brought were captured as the exhibition moved from place to place. Similarly, for *MoW* including elements about local Jewish past – through the interactive map indicating places related to the Jewish community formerly inhabiting the town and through local events; was crucial for how the project was designed and run. However, I show in the thesis that a whole array of difficult and challenging matters related to local memory about Jews was often not explicitly included in what *MoW* presented, yet it was evoked in the reactions of visitors of the pavilion.

1.3 Rationale and significance

Studying museums' outreach projects is indispensable to understand how museums' attempts to increase their social relevance and community-orientation rely on, and interact with, other agents: individuals, communities, organisations. To date, there is little academic literature analysing outreach initiatives where museums work with other actors, because collaboration in the museum sector is largely studied using examples of collaborative exhibition making (see for instance: Boast 2011; Harrison 2005; Kahn 2000; Morse, Macpherson, and Robinson 2013; Schultz 2011). My thesis rectifies this gap by revealing the diversity of needs, expectations and interests, which shape collaborative museum projects. By 'collaboration' I mean including actors such as individual people, groups or communities who contribute with their stories, knowledge, ideas or expertise to making particular projects of the museum suitable for these actors' needs. Yet, this inclusion may have various degrees and it implies

[6]There was one display of books and magazines about 'the intervention of the German Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Nationalists' and one small panel at the very end of the exhibition with two headings: 'Spanish Republicans deported to Nazi concentration camps' and 'Auschwitz prisoners from Spanish nationality or origin' offered information related to Spain. A few people of around 30 years of age from Spain who visited the exhibition told me that they were disappointed by this but not surprised – talking about Franco in Spain is a difficult and controversial topic.

that while some actors are included, there are others who are excluded. The interaction between the museum and actors who are invited to collaborate is defined by various imbalances (Boast 2011) and may rest on unexamined assumptions (Morse, Macpherson, and Robinson 2013, 92).

Analyses of museums often place the institution at the centre of the study, for example by exploring how exhibitions or museum programs are made, agendas created, or how various actors within the museum and from outside of it shape the institution's work. In the recent decades there emerged a growing body of research exploring the reception and engagement of audiences with museums' work (Falk and Dierking 2016, 15), but what remains insufficiently explored is the relationship between audiences' engagement and the institutions' programmes. In other words, there needs to be a more comprehensive understanding of how museums are embracing new museology by collaborating with audiences (Vergo 1989). As such they negotiate their positions in society as participatory, inclusive, democratic and relevant institutions. In this thesis I am particularly interested in museums that engage with memory and/or history which is 'difficult': it requires intellectual and emotional effort because it is challenging, painful or disturbing for visitors. Addressing difficult topics in public life belongs to the responsibility that museums assign to themselves: as social agents and community-oriented institutions (Rose 2016, 4; Tinning 2017, 5).

Among the museums which tackle difficult topics are memory museums: institutions that engage with the past through the lens of memory. These museums use a range of forms of narration to create opportunities for visitors to "gain access to the past through the eyes of individuals and their personal memories" (Arnold de-Simine 2013, 10). I follow Arnold de-Simine's terminology in using 'memory museum' instead of 'memorial museum'. 'Memorial museum' as defined by Paul Williams is "a specific kind of museum dedicated to a historic event commemorating mass suffering of some kind" (2007, 8). Focusing on a museum

project that engages with difficult memory about Jews in Poland, I explore the interactions between the museum and its local collaboration partners. I argue that *MoW* as a collaborative outreach project was shaped by a number of tensions: between the interests and expectations of the museum and its local partners, between local stories about the past and POLIN's narratives, between inclusion and exclusion of Jews into and from the memoryscapes and collective memory narratives. In relation to collective memory, I use the term 'vernacular' to refer to the informal, local, as opposed to official and institutional. Apart from addressing the gap in research on museum outreach projects, this thesis explores the vernacular level of collective memory in order to contribute to a growing body of research which grants attention to this local, communal level of collective memory (e.g. Gensburger 2019, Musalkova 2018, Van de Putte 2019).

The concept of 'memory' on the collective, social level is central for this thesis for a number of reasons. Firstly, as mentioned already, the particular itinerant museum project in question engaged with collective memory about former Jewish inhabitants of Polish villages, towns and cities. Exploring how the actors contributing to the collaborative project (the museum, local activists, visitors, teachers, events' participants or uninvolved passers-by) constructed collective memory about Jews through stories and embodied performances is vital for understanding the tensions that shaped this itinerant museum. I use the term 'collective memory', originally coined in early 20th century by Maurice Halbwachs (1992)[7], as a lens through which to explore memory as "the product of the social environment experienced by the individual" (Gensburger 2016, 403).

Secondly, so far, much of the widely cited works of memory studies focuses on policies or cultural productions such as books, films, and museum exhibitions, without

[7]The book published in 1992 is a translation by Lewis Coser from "Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire", Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1952, originally published in *Les Travaux de L'Année Sociologique*, Paris, F. Alcan, 1925.

examining how audiences engage with them[8]. In this thesis I use a sociological approach to memory seen as emerging through social interactions (Gensburger 2016) to bring attention to individuals and their role in collaborative museum-making, and by extension also in creating collective memory. I provide a further overview of the relevant research in memory studies in the Literature Review. The work of museums, as mentioned in this Introduction, is crucial for constructing memory communities (Arnold- de Simine 2013, 1–2), and therefore an analysis of interactions which shape a museum project can shed light on the dynamics of collective memory making.

Thirdly, as I explain in the following chapter, *Museum on Wheels* brought difficult memory to the surface. Difficult memory engages both cognitive and affective elements of an individual's experience and poses substantial challenges to "their interpretative abilities" (Bonell and Simon 2007, 67). *MoW* evoked painful, challenging and difficult memory – of loss, displacement, violence, war, the Holocaust, shame, fear, anger, racism. I show that, as Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski argue (2016), remembering Jews in Poland, even if it is through stories about culture, religion or centuries-long Jewish presence and contributions to the country's development, as in POLIN's agenda, cannot be detached from remembering the Holocaust and acknowledging antisemitism. In that sense, then, memory about Jews is difficult, and dealing with it should include acknowledging the ways in which antisemitism, or more broadly allosemitism (Bauman 1998), in the past and present contribute(d) to the inclusions or exclusions of Jews into or from Polish society. The notion of allosemitism, following Zygmunt Bauman, includes both philosemitism and antisemitism and denotes any characterization of Jews as a fundamentally separate group. Chapter Two explains how allosemitism is a crucial trope in narratives about Jews in contemporary Poland.

[8]See for example: Alison Landsberg (2004), Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2006) or Michael Rothberg (2009).

By demonstrating the importance of collective memory on the vernacular level, to which locals contribute in collaborative museum-making, this thesis shows how *Museum on Wheels* was created by multiple actors. Particularly, it brings attention to how audience contributions in small towns and communities shape the outreach of museums evoking difficult memory. These contributions include not only what individuals do in a museum project, for example by taking responsibility for particular elements, acquiring knowledge and skills, but also what their needs and expectations are and how these are shaped by the collective memory narratives on the vernacular level, here difficult memory about Jews. The collective memory about Jews on vernacular level which, as this thesis shows, was crucial for shaping *Museum on Wheels,* was framed by a preoccupation with Jewish absence. The current absence of Jews, who for centuries until the Holocaust constituted an integral part of small town and village populations in Poland, remains among the key elements shaping local memoryscapes (Kapralski 2011). Locals are 'occupied with' this absence in various ways, as I will show in the thesis. I use the notion of memoryscape according to Sławomir Kapralski to bring attention to the spatial aspect of mobilisations of past in the present[9]. Memoryscape is "a sort of 'memorial landscape' with a certain material and symbolic shape, through which 'collective memory is commonly spatialized' (Muzaini and Yeoh 2005, p. 33)".

Exploring a museum project that evoked difficult memory, and did so in rural areas, allows me to demonstrate not only the complexity of collaboration in an outreach project, but also to reveal how the relationship between urban and rural contexts may impact the productive reception of such a project. This is particularly pertinent as there exists a growing body of historical, sociological and anthropological research about the memory of Jews in Poland (see for instance: Orla-Bukowska 2004; Lehrer and Meng 2015; Tokarska-Bakir

[9]I am aware that the verb 'to mobilise' has two meanings: "to put into movement or circulation" and "to assemble and make ready for war duty" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary n.d.), and in this thesis I use it referring to the former.

2013; Zubrzycki 2016b), yet few of the works focus on present-day collective memory in the rural areas of the country (exceptions include: Kapralski 2011; Murzyn-Kupisz 2015; Romik 2018; Törnquist-Plewa 2007). Studying the interactions occurring in the context of *MoW*'s interventions into local memoryscapes (Kapralski 2011) provides an opportunity to deepen the understanding of collective memory about Jews in rural Poland. Much of the work of museums, NGOs or foundations which engage with memory about Jews is run either in the cities only or it is planned, administrated and managed from cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań. Lublin et cetera. Investigating how people in small towns interacted with an initiative which was coordinated from the capital city shows in what ways collective memory about Jews remains a vivid issue in small towns.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The research questions explored in this thesis are:

1) How did various actors (the museum, local activists, visitors) collaboratively shape *Museum on Wheels*?

2) How did difficult memory about Jews contribute to the collaborative museum-making of *Museum on Wheels*?

To address these questions, I analyse POLIN's itinerant museum on two levels, using a range of qualitative methods which are described in Chapter Four. First, I investigate how *MoW* was created, planned, implemented and received as a collaborative museum outreach project in rural Poland. Second, I study how the itinerant museum evoked individuals' stories related to difficult memory about Jewish presence in Poland, and how these stories resonated with narratives about Jews on the local and national levels prevalent at the time. I examine both levels by analysing the needs, interests and expectations of the museum and the local actors, be it local activists who worked with the museum (Chapter Five) or the visitors and participants of events (Chapters Six – Eight). My main argument is that that tensions

between the needs and interests of different actors, as well as between the narratives about local and national past that these actors contributed to the travelling museum, defined how collaborative museum-making worked. These tensions made the engagements with difficult memory, evoked by *MoW*, an interactive negotiation about the inclusion or exclusion of Jews from collective memory in Poland in the 21st century.

I particularly bring attention to how visitors and other local agents who interacted with the itinerant museum on the vernacular level contributed to the collaborative museum-making. The vernacular here, understood as local, informal, connected to the everyday, is set in contrast with officialised and institutionalised forms directed by the state or for example museums[10]. Chapters Two to Four establish the analytical framework to explore memory, museums, explain the methodology for this research and set the background to understand POLIN Museum and *MoW* in the context of new museology (Vergo 1989). Chapter Two describes the relevant collective memory narratives about Jews in Poland and outlines the broader framework in which the travelling museum is situated in relation to similar projects in Poland. In Chapter Three I outline the key theories related to memory and museums that are crucial for this thesis. Finally, in Chapter Four I explain the epistemological and methodological framework used, as well as describe my positionality in relation to this research.

Chapters Five and Six explore how *MoW* was created collaboratively by both POLIN Museum and local activists. A collaborative approach in *MoW* is crucial, and, as I show in Chapter Five, the relationship between the local activists who joined the project as 'coordinators', and the museum with its strategy and discourse on the surface appeared to satisfy most people involved. Yet, when examined more in detail, it reveals to be defined by

[10]My definition is based on Avril Maddrell's (2012) and Hamzah Muzaini's (2013) treatment of the term. Muzaini is also interested in the vernacular in relation to memory and he defines 'vernacular memory making' as "(...) popular and informal forms of remembering, including private and individual recollections of the past in domestic, communal and everyday settings (Maddrell 2012), to be contrasted with the more officialised and generally encompassing scaffolding of public memory usually spearheaded by the state." (Muzaini 2013, 406).

a tension. The needs and expectations of local activists were long-term, while for the museum the ephemerality of the visit was considered most valuable. I suggest that for POLIN, prioritising the participation of high numbers of locals at events, and visitors to the pavilion, resulted in insufficient engagement of the museum with the long-term needs and difficult memory related to the preoccupation with Jewish absence demonstrated in visited towns.

Chapter Six expands the analysis of the role of local activists, showing how the events they run locally to accompany the *MoW* visit were articulations of the local preoccupation with Jewish absence, rather than an engagement with POLIN's message about Jewish culture, presence and continuity in Poland throughout centuries. It demonstrates that the needs of local activists, and the local communities they worked in, were related to engaging with this preoccupation with Jewish absence – whether it was articulated by covering it up (for example by employing nostalgic tropes[11]) or attempting to critically engage with it. Yet, as that chapter shows, POLIN did not address these needs explicitly.

Chapters Seven and Eight concentrate on visitors' interactions with the itinerant museum. In Chapter Seven I examine how collective memory about Jews on vernacular level was articulated through the stories that locals engaging with *MoW* shared during interviews. I discuss how locals negotiated inclusion and exclusion through these stories: of themselves to the local communities and of Jews to the local memoryscapes. The nostalgic and allosemitic tropes, which as I show were present amidst the ways used to deal with the preoccupation with Jewish absence, were shaped by the interactions between the personal and social levels of memory, and that defining belonging remained of principal importance in the stories told.

In Chapter Eight I explore one of the main tropes that emerged in the stories I gathered: the trope of Righteous Defence (Grabowski 2016). In this trope, stories about non-

[11]Trope in this thesis is defined as "a significant or recurrent theme; a motif" following "the Oxford English Dictionary" (Oxford English Dictionary online n.d.).

Jews helping Jews during the Holocaust and WW2 in Poland are highlighted without explaining the wider context, which includes some non-Jews helping Nazis and supporting the Holocaust. I show that although the interests behind including the trope of Righteous Defence differed for the local visitors and for the museum, building a positive self-image using this trope was key for both.

CHAPTER TWO Background and context to *Museum on Wheels* in Poland

Jews have lived on the historic territories of Poland for one thousand years (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2016), and for centuries the historic territories of Poland were the most welcoming area in Europe for the Jewish community, and certainly the centre of European, but possibly even world, Jewry (Blobaum 2005; Hauman 2002). POLIN Museum builds its narrative around this one thousand years of Jewish presence in Poland both for its exhibitions and programmes in Warsaw as well as *Museum on Wheels* and other outreach projects. This chapter situates POLIN's work within the broader landscape of initiatives about Jewish culture and history in Poland.

These initiatives have been flourishing especially since the fall of communism in 1990 and therefore I first provide a historical overview of Jewish presence, and absence, in Poland focusing on the 20th century, and connect it to the notion of mobility. I then explain how the historical 'otherness' of Jews in narratives of Polishness influences the perceptions of Jews in the present. Next, I outline the political developments that were particularly crucial for Jews and collective memory about Jews in Poland since the Holocaust, identifying four periods: communism, post-communism until 2000, early 2000s-2015 and 2015-Spring 2018. The interviewees whose responses inform this thesis were born in either the first or the second of these periods and thus the developments in their lifetime are summarized here to show the broader political and societal frameworks in which the individuals' experiences are situated. The timeframe, furthermore, situates POLIN Museum and *Museum on Wheels* in the context of political changes occurring in Poland since WW2 and the Holocaust. The final section of this chapter offers an overview of POLIN's work in relation to the premises of 'new museology' (Vergo 1989) and explains how *MoW* is a flagship initiative guided by the ideas of openness, social relevance and pluralisation of voices in the museum. Last but not

least, the chapter briefly describes how *MoW* was structured and organised from 2014 till 2017.

2.1 Jewish absence in Poland

Even though for centuries Jews and non-Jews cohabited one territory, they knew little about each other and they lived in "'mutual good-natured contempt' for each other that allowed them to live in a grudging coexistence rather than conflict" (Blobaum 2005, 2). In Europe, prior to WW2, the Second Polish Republic was the most ethnically diverse state in Europe, with one third of the population identifying as non-Polish. The largest groups were Ukrainians, Jews, Belorussians and Germans (Mendelsohn 1987, 14). 10 percent of the population, around three million inhabitants, defined themselves as Jewish (Heller 1994).[12] Relations between the different groups constituting the population of Poland during the interwar period were complex, ranging from cooperation, and friendship through indifference to envy, hostility and prejudice (Heller 1994; Mendelsohn 1987).[13]

The Holocaust brought a disastrous end to the Second Republic which was home to members of multiple cultural, religious and national groups, and 90 percent of the Jewish population of Poland was annihilated (Steinlauf 1997). During the Holocaust, non-Jewish Poles adopted a variety of approaches towards Polish Jews who were the target group to be murdered in the Holocaust. Some were overtly hostile and collaborated with the Nazis or exploited the situation of the Jews for personal gain, for example by blackmailing the Jews or appropriating their property. Others helped by providing shelter, food or other material support or information to Jews who tried to save themselves, while others still remained indifferent (Engelking 2011; Grabowski 2011; Janicka 2015b, 210).

[12]Jews formed a separate community with distinct forms of social organization (Heller 1994) and numerous sub-groups depending on the denomination of Judaism they belonged to, political party, language they spoke. Majority of Jews in Poland declared Yiddish to be their first language (79 percent), 12 percent mentioned Polish and 3 percent Hebrew. However, it is estimated that most Jews were bilingual with Polish and Yiddish (Schatz 1991, 34).

[13]Legally, Jews as all minorities were equal with other citizens. Yet, there were often cases of discrimination and antisemitism in economic, cultural life or education (Schatz 1991, 26).

When it comes to narrating the Holocaust in the collective memory of Poland in the 21st century, Poles are on the one hand the biggest national group among Righteous Among the Nations recognized by Yad Vashem for helping Jews during the Holocaust (Yad Vashem 2018), and in recent years this has often been emphasised in public debates about the Holocaust in Poland. On the other, some non-Jewish Poles helped or collaborated with Nazis in one way or another, either by exploiting or blackmailing Jewish Poles, appropriating their property or denouncing anyone who was helping Jews trying to save themselves (Engelking 2011; Grabowski 2011). For instance, in nine rural districts[14] in various parts of Poland, 30 percent of the Jews who sought refuge survived, while 60 percent died, and the fate of remaining 10 percent is unknown (Engelking and Grabowski 2018, 32). In most of these districts, "a decisive majority of Jews who tried to rescue themselves – on the basis of investigated and verified cases – died at the hands of Poles or were killed due to the co-participation of Poles" (2018, 37).

Publications like the one quoted above provoke intense public debates among academic and non-academic audiences (see for instance an article in a weekly Polish Newsweek by Aleksandra Pawlicka (2018)). In these debates, some participants seek to protect the positive self-image of the Polish nation, claiming that those who committed disgraceful acts are exceptions and should not be considered as part of the national community. Others argue to critically examine difficult memory that such publications arouse, acknowledging that it might be challenging and requires a lot of effort to deal with the complex Polish/Jewish past.

Coming back to the historical overview, after 1946, of those Jews who escaped, were saved, or moved to the East during the Holocaust, only around 90,000 returned and remained in Poland (Aleksiun 2001, 227). By the 1950s one-third had emigrated and only

[14]For most cases the borders of a researched district were marked on the basis of *Kreiskauptmannschaften*, which were the districts into which the territory was divided during the Nazi German occupation from 1939.

around 60,000 stayed (Aleksiun 2001). The communist regime which seized control after WW2 did not overtly discriminate against or prosecute Jews, but it also did not offer them much protection (Gross 2001). In the pogrom of 43 Jews in Kielce, in July 1946, state organs took no decisive measures to stop the violence (Prażmowska 2010). Other acts of hostility and discrimination occurred throughout the country and in general Jews were not welcomed by the majority of the population (Gross 2001, 258).

Even though there were very few Jews in Poland at the time, probably the most popularly spread stereotype against Jews related to the post-war and communist period was that allegedly all Jews, or at least most of them, collaborated with and "actively supported Poland's chief enemy of the 20th century - the Soviet regime" (Michlic 2007, 32). In the period following the war it was commonly considered that because Jewish Poles cooperated with the Communists against non-Jewish Poles, they were thus appointed to high official positions, and they exploited their power and influence to ruthlessly oppress non-Jewish Poles.[15] The overall sense of alienation towards the new, externally-imposed, political system was congruent with this attitude towards Jews (Śpiewak 2012, 2).[16] Though initially not targeting Jews, the leaders of the communist state shifted their approach in the 1960s. In 1968 an antisemitic campaign and purge was initiated by communist party leadership to essentially eliminate the unwanted party members, journalists, academics, and people of any other professions (Stola 2006).[17] As a result of this antisemitic campaign, another wave of

[15]Stanisław Krajewski (2011) puts forward 10 theses related to the concept, and in these he argues that the importance of Jews in the communist system apparatus should be acknowledged, but at the same time he points to exaggerations on the phenomenon, as brought up by antisemites, and mentions the immense influence of the political and social circumstances during the communist period.

[16]Paweł Śpiewak, the director of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, in a book published in 2012 *Żydokomuna. Interpretacje historyczne* ("Judeocommunism. Historical interpretations"), analyses the origins and persistence of the myth of Judeocommunism in Poland. He argues that after the World War I it superseded the previously dominant antisemitic narratives and prevailed in various forms in the public and private discourse of interwar period, then during the WW2 as well as in the communist era.

[17]For Dariusz Stola (2006) antisemitism of the 1968 purges was the symbol of communist Poland's attitude towards the Jews and Israel. Yet, allegedly, targeting Zionists in the campaign was a complex code used by the party leaders to express belonging to a particular group within the party, express frustration with the system and

emigration ensued, and the significant number of those still in Poland left and only a few thousand Jews reportedly remained in Poland by the 1980s (Zubrzycki 2016a, 67).

Currently, there are up to 40,000 Jews living in Poland, which is less than 0.1 percent of its 38 million inhabitants (Zubrzycki 2016a, 67). The history of Jews and other minorities living in Poland over the centuries, has for decades been neglected and largely absent from officially prevalent narratives about Polish history in education, culture, and commemorative events (Tokarska-Bakir 2013; Zubrzycki 2016b). Clearly, the loss of the pre-WW2 cultural and religious diversity of the population and the abrupt and violent process of destruction of Jewish communities have left indelible marks on the landscape of villages, towns and cities and on historical consciousness of inhabitants of postwar Poland[18] (Kapralski 2011; Murzyn-Kupisz 2015; Zubrzycki 2016a, 2016b).

The absence of Jews and difficult memory of the Holocaust, from which it cannot be separated, evokes a range of reactions: some seek to deny, neglect or forget elements of it, others strive to understand, or critically explore. This absence of Jews stems from the past and particularly the Holocaust as an event which defines it, but the consequences of this past event reach into the present and the future. This is not only about the Jewish population being murdered and disappearing from the rural memoryscapes. It is also about the relationships between the members of this Jewish population and their non-Jewish neighbours before and during the Holocaust, and then the ways in which Jews are, or are not, at present remembered and/or commemorated in the communities where they used to live. To show how this Jewish absence plays a role for the wider memory narratives about

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to alleviate the inability to understand the dynamic world (ibid.). The targeted Zionists did not necessarily need to be Jewish, but had qualities characterizing the imaginary threatening Jews, the socio-cultural Polish other.

[18]Sławomir Kapralski suggests a useful understanding of landscape in Poland precisely in relation to Polish/Jewish history. He describes landscape as a cultural construction which facilitates "creating and/or maintaining the group's identity" (2001, 35), it is a territory which is imbued with cultural meaning, including particular understandings of the past. Landscape is a realm of remembering and forgetting, and those who inhabit it can manipulate the material representations which remained after those who perished or left the territory (ibid., 37). Thus, in Poland at present mainly non-Jews have decisive power over the landscape which was for centuries an arena shaped by diverse cultural, religious, national groups.

Polish/Jewish past in Poland, the key developments in memory politics of the last seven decades which are relevant to this thesis are outlined later in this chapter, and the historical and contemporary perceptions of Jews as 'other' are described. Before that, however, I explain how this thesis conceptualises the relationship between 'Polish' and 'Jewish' elements: of memoryscapes, stories, identities and connect it to mobility of people, data, and things. Using the notion of 'Polish/Jewish' helps me to point at the duality and interaction which are vital to the relationship between the 'Polish' and 'Jewish' elements of the past in the present in Poland.

2.2 Mobility and Polish/Jewish history

For museums and their audiences, engaging with narratives, exhibitions, performances or various other activities requires physical movements of objects and people; mobility of data; engagement with digital and analogue media, all of which cannot occur without the presence of material and situated infrastructures. The mobility turn/paradigm in the 1990s has brought the concept of mobility to the centre of attention in social sciences, questioning how various social entities presume various forms of actual and potential movement.[19] Mobility includes "different forms of travel, transport and communications (…) [and] the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces" (Urry 2007, 6). Several scholars argue to analyse mobility together with immobility, and the assumptions and mechanisms that underlay them (e.g. Faist 2013, Sheller 2011, Urry 2007). Mobility "encompasses both the embodied practice of movement and the representations, ideologies and meanings attached to both movement and stillness" (Sheller 2011, 1). Mobility and immobility are significant for researching *Museum on Wheels* in

[19]Defining, and consequentially studying movement is a challenging task. According to Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (2011), movement does not have clearly definable boundaries and it is not "readily recognized and identified" (Sheets-Johnstone 2011, 477). In this, it contrasts action and behaviour which can be more easily demarcated and examined. Movement involves "kinaesthetic experience and the spatio-temporal-energetic qualities inherent in that experience" (ibid.). Sheets-Johnstone, in her interdisciplinary book argues for a more comprehensive exploration of movement in philosophy and cognitive sciences.

Poland in a number of ways, and here I refer to two of them. *MoW* was an itinerant initiative: it moved between locations with the aim of reaching audiences which had not yet travelled to POLIN in Warsaw and might never do; so, mobility of the pavilion as opposed to assumed immobility of the locals is a crucial conceptual element of the travelling museum. Secondly, *MoW* sought to encourage locals to question what and how they know about local and national history by bringing in stories about Jewish communities and arguing for their incorporation into collective memory narratives in Poland.

The transmission and interaction which contributes to the relationship between what is 'Polish' and 'Jewish', and what is present and absent, can be conceptualised using Todd Samuel Presner's work on Jewish/German modernity (2007). Presner considers the importance of mobility for German/Jewish modernity and his approach provides conceptual tools to describe the relationship between narratives that are by some presented as 'Polish', 'Jewish', or as a mixture of the two. In his book "Mobile modernity – Germans, Jews, Trains", he offers useful insights into the connection between the study of mobility, and the past in general, by describing a series of dialectic encounters between German and Jewish thinkers structured geographically around certain locations (for instance Auschwitz or Vienna-Rome-Prague-Antwerp-Paris). He writes:

> if mobility is taken to be the raw material of historical analysis, a new emphasis on the relationship between space and time informs the investigation, allowing us to focus on the complexities of intercultural transmission, contamination, exchange, translation, migration and transgression (Presner 2007, 21).

In talking about German/Jewish history, Presner proposes to use the separatix because it "simultaneously separates the two (or potentially more) concepts and brings them together in a dialectical unity" (Presner 2007, 20). For him, "the fact of a separatix is the starting point for any study of mobility" (ibid.); he emphasises the "significance of space and mobility for the [German/Jewish] history" (ibid., 11). His proposition to use mobility as a

lens to examine the complex, dialectic relationship between the 'Jewish' and 'German' elements can be very productive for this thesis; thus, I draw on Presner's approach to account for the multiplicity of and relationship between trajectories of memories in Poland and about Poland abroad. It can be especially fruitful for reflecting on the relationship between 'Polish' and 'Jewish' in Polish history as it is narrativized in contemporary Poland and abroad. I use Jewish/Polish and Polish/Jewish interchangeably in the thesis to indicate that it is the dialectic relationship between the two might be defined differently depending on who is referring to it and why. I do not attempt, however, to define what 'Polishness' or 'Jewishness' are, but I do want to emphasise that memory about Jews in Poland is a social construction which emerges in interactions and can imply different definitions in different contexts.

2.3 Jews as the defining 'other'

Historically, 'the Jew' constituted a defining other for narratives of Polishness (Michlic 2006; Cała 1995). Thus, for centuries, victimhood, innocence and selfless sacrifice of the Polish nation have been represented predominantly by courageous male soldiers, guerilla fighters, victims of Nazi and Soviet atrocities and persecution, and Righteous Among Nations who helped or saved Jews during the Holocaust. The in-group, those who are included in the narrative, are Poles of Catholic faith epitomized in a stereotypical image of *Polak-Katolik* (Pole-Catholic). The out-group, the unfamiliar strangers, are Jews (Michlic 2006). Jews, if who have assimilated can then become part of the Polish nation, sharing the experiences of the Poles; or they can be perceived as representatives of a homogenous group of threatening outsiders, whose narrative about the past competes against the Polish one. Over the course of the last decade, Joanna Michlic (2006) and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (2011, 2013) have argued that memory about Jews in Poland, most significantly when regarding the Holocaust and WW2, is depicted in a competitive framework – us, Catholic Poles, and them, Jews.

According to Tokarska-Bakir "'Objects' such as 'Jews' and 'Poles' are fetishised—that is, presented as autonomous and alien to one another (…)" (2011, 144).

Although for this thesis I do not find it productive to establish a distinction between 'Jews' and 'Poles', it is important to note that, for certain actors in the Polish public sphere, the perception of Jews as a defining other for the Polish 'self' is influential in depicting Jews as non-Poles in narratives about Polish/Jewish past. For example, elsewhere in this chapter I described the #RespectUs campaign from 2018 and in Chapter Eight I discuss the new legislation also from 2018 which aims to control how non-Jewish Poles are depicted in narratives about the Holocaust. These developments in the public sphere provide the context in which *Museum on Wheels* was collaboratively shaped by POLIN Museum and communities to which it travelled.

Perceiving Jews as a fundamentally separate outsider group which always remains other and cannot become part of the in-group and keep their distinct cultural and religious characteristics at the same time is defined as allosemitism (Bauman 1998). In allosemitic approaches, Jews are set apart as profoundly different people who require "separate concepts to describe and comprehend them and special treatment in all or most social intercourse" (Bauman 1998, 143). Allosemitism can include both philosemitism and antisemitism, it is ambivalent and does not "unambiguously determine either hatred or love of Jews, but contains the seeds of both, and assures that whichever of the two appears, is intense and extreme" (Bauman 1998, 143).

Philosemitism, defined generally as favourable characterizations of the Jewish people, is a term which originally had a political and derogatory meaning, as it was created in late 19th century Germany by self-declared antisemites to denunciate their opponents (Karp and Sutcliffe 2011, 1). The word "remains inevitably tainted by etymological association with its antonym" (ibid., 2), but similarly to 'antisemitism', it is widely used as a

term and a subject of research. Convincingly, Thomas Altfelix points out how in post-Holocaust Germany, philosemitism is about othering through "an ostentatious display of xenophilia towards a discriminated out-group" (2000, 42), in this case the Jews. Philosemitism provides "an image of (Jewish) otherness which is perfectly suited to an in-group-oriented political instrumentalization" (Altfelix 2000, 56). Similarly, writing about the Polish context in the early 21st century, Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski characterize philosemitism as an approach to Jews where "surrounded by best intentions and endowed with best feelings, 'Jews' are (...) a phantasma, a fantasy responding to the deficits and demands of their aficionado: the dominant group, so the Polish majority." (2016, 10).[20] In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I show how philosemitism, or allosemitism, which I use to refer to the wider range of approaches to Jews, were evoked in engagements of locals with the travelling museum.

Also under the umbrella term of allosemitism, is 'antisemitism'. In this thesis, antisemitism is defined as a form of hostility against Jews. Antisemitism is best identified by its definition of 'Jew' as opposed to a particular attitude; it signifies the hostility towards Jews as 'Jews' (Klug 2003). "For the 'Jew' towards whom the antisemite feels hostile is not a real Jew at all. Thinking that Jews are really 'Jews' is precisely the core of antisemitism." (Klug 2003, 6). Although as far as I am aware, there are no attempts to measure allosemitism in quantitative terms, studies on antisemitism are regularly conducted in Poland. These studies are worth mentioning in order to better understand the prominence of anti-Jewish prejudice and misconceptions.

[20]Geneviève Zubrzycki proposes a different approach to philosemitism, which is much broader. She uses the term 'philosemitism' to describe "a wide spectrum of practices motivated by a curiosity and desire to learn about Jewishness, and attempts to uncover and preserve the remnants of Jewish life and honor the millions of Jews (Polish and non-Polish) murdered on Polish soil" (2016a, 70). Zubrzycki's approach is useful to appreciate how the interest in Jewish heritage in Poland could contribute to building an inclusive concept of Polish nation where "national self is being built not only against the Other (the Jew), but also through that indigenous Other in opposition to an alleged primordial 'self' – the ethno-Catholic Pole" (2016a, 92). Yet, because she is approaching the phenomenon so broadly, assuming that all this interest is motivated by curiosity to learn and discover the Jewish/Polish past, her definition does not provide useful analytical tools to understand the complexity of collective memory about Jews in Poland.

For instance, in a research report published in 2013, 30 percent of Poles "openly declare aversion towards people with Jewish origins" and on the basis of longitudinal studies, the trend appears to persist (Bilewicz, Winiewski, and Soral 2013). Then, according to the Public Opinion Research Centre, between 2013 and 2018 this aversion towards Jews in Poland fluctuated between 26 percent and 37 percent, with the highest in 2015 and lowest in 2016 (Omyła-Rudzka 2018). Antisemitism, similarly as philosemitism, serves to build a favourable image of the in-group and delineate boundaries of belonging by depicting Jews as hostile outsiders. This can occur for instance by 'accusing' political opponents of having Jewish roots "usually indicating some mysterious alien control or loyalty to other countries or organizations" (Bilewicz, Winiewski, and Radzik 2012, 2803). Although in this thesis I use the term 'allosemitism' more frequently, case study data which clearly denotes hostility towards Jews will be described as 'antisemitism'.

On the other hand, one can find a significant number of initiatives which challenge the allosemitic understanding of Jews as 'other' – individuals and organisations in villages, small towns as well as in urban centres engage in challenging the misconceptions and exclusions of Jews from memoryscapes. This includes critically examining the troublesome elements of Polish/Jewish past and acknowledging that such explorations may deconstruct the positive image of oneself and one's local or national community. Some of such initiatives are mentioned in the following section.

2.4 Mnemonic timeframe

The timeframe in which I study difficult memory about Jews in Poland is divided in this thesis into four periods below. This division is determined on the basis of the official narratives articulated in the public sphere: discourses of ruling party/parties; publicly- funded media; and school curricula, which I see as dominant in these phases for shaping collective memory about Jews in Poland.

2.4.1 Communism

What I refer to as 'communism' is the period of Soviet dominance in Poland which began as a result of the Yalta agreement in February 1945 (Judt 2010, 101). Poland after WW2 became the 'Polish People's Republic' (*Polska Republika Ludowa*, PRL) as it fell under the USSR's sphere of influence. Between 1945 (the end of WW2) and 1989, when communism collapsed, memory about Jews and considerations about Jewish heritage were subsumed into a metanarrative of the homogenous Polish nation. As Annamaria Orla-Bukowska explains:

> A Sovietised society was assumed to be composed of able-bodied, fully employed workers with matching needs and desires, requiring identical resolution. The new socialist regime strove to eradicate all differences. Controlled at best, or banned at worst, minority groups (…) were most often ignored or hidden from sight. So, too, would be their distinct histories. (Orla-Bukowska 2004, 2)

Jews as a group were not prosecuted, but they were also not protected against any antisemitic violence or hostility while the majority of the population was not welcoming towards Jewish Holocaust survivors (Gross 2001, 258). Jewish communal property from the pre-war period could not be claimed by any Jewish associations after an official circular issued in 1945, which declared that pre-war Jewish communities did not possess any legal heirs in post-war Poland (Weizman 2017, 37). Private property could only be claimed by original owners or direct heirs, in contrast to the pre-war legislation which included second-degree relatives (ibid., 36). Generally, during communism Jews and other minorities did not get protection or support from the state, neither in their daily lives, nor in safeguarding their heritage. The focus was on sameness and all difference was to be eradicated. The official narrative about the Holocaust depicted it as an element of the WW2, which was a Polish loss and tragedy:

> The genocide of Polish Jews was usually presented as an integral part of the ethnic Polish tragedy, as in the statement that 'six million Poles died during the war' (...) This, in turn, led to the presentation of the Holocaust as an event somehow parallel to the ethnic Polish tragedy of the war: Jewish deaths were described as numerically equivalent to ethnic Polish deaths (...). (Polonsky and Michlic 2009, 6–7).

Only in the 1980s would this narrative be shattered. Created by Poles, who were treated as an ethnic or national group, and the main victim of the WW2, it was shattered by three developments in the socio-political and cultural world: Lanzman's film *Shoah* (1985), a controversy around the Carmelite Convent in Oświęcim/Auschwitz (1985-1993), and an essay published by Jan Błoński "Poor Poles look at the ghetto" (1987) (Janicka and Żukowski 2016, 7). In the thesis, I make many references to the communist period because it had a seminal impact on how Jews would be remembered by individuals who engaged with *MoW*, including those I interviewed. Additionally, references to the period appeared in local narratives about both Jews and Jewish heritage. The collapse of communism, furthermore, was one of the key developments to establish the political and social context which allowed for the creation of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

2.4.2 Post-communism until 2000

The first period after the fall of communism which I delineate consists of around 10 years following 1989/1990. The 1990s was a period of rapid change in political, economic and social spheres. A few of the interviewees who are informed this thesis were born in the 1990s as well, although majority was born earlier and were already adults or teenagers by 1990 (see Appendix One). The Third Polish Republic (*Rzeczpospolita Polska*) was emerging: a democratic state, eager to join the capitalist world and settle relationships with its new neighbours and the international community (Kamusella 2003; Kopeček and Wciślik 2015). In post-communist countries, this period is characterised by some as a 'transition' or 'transformation' implying "the wished-for democratic future", or, using a language with strong normative connotations such as "liberal oriented 1990s; the time of market and democracy building and of the imagined 'return to Europe.'" (Kopeček and Wciślik 2015, 1). As for minorities, the 1997 Constitution included them as citizens with full rights: the cultivation of minority languages, cultural traditions, religion etc. was guaranteed in Article

35 and other Articles which mentioned various freedoms of Polish citizens (Kamusella 2003). When it comes to Jewish property, in 1997 the restitution regulations regarding Jewish properties were changed in relation to the communal property - it was returned to Jewish communities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland 2012); but there is no generic law that would regulate Jewish private property: claimants need to go through the Polish court system and the decisions are made on a case-to-case basis (World Jewish Restitution Organisation 2018). There remains international pressure and on-going discussions up to the time of writing, about establishing a generic legislation on returning the Jewish property confiscated by the Nazis (World Jewish Restitution Organisation 2018).

With regards to memory about the Holocaust and about Jews in Polish history in general, accounts became more pluralised in the increasingly democratic public sphere. The publication of Jan Błoński's essay in 1987 was followed by other academic interventions, for example Alina Cała's "The image of the Jew in Polish folk culture" (1995), as well as cultural and social initiatives. In late 1980s and 1990s many non-governmental organisations were formed, largely in bigger cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Lublin, with an interest in discovering, protecting and promoting Jewish heritage and Jewish past in Poland. The 1990s were in general a time of increasing openness towards interest in and engagement with Jewish culture, when events such as the Jewish Culture Festival in Cracow, established in 1988 (Festiwal Kultury Żydowskiej 2018), slowly began to gain popularity among Jewish and non-Jewish audiences from Poland and beyond.

Also in the 1990s, the idea of establishing a Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Poland started gaining shape at the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute (POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2016). First in 1993, inspired by the Holocaust Museum in Washington which opened that year, an International Honorary Committee was created to develop and promote the idea of the Museum (POLIN Museum of the History of

Polish Jews 2014). Gradually, the idea gained support in Poland and abroad, and works on the project of the museum began in 1995 (ibid.). The end of this first post-communist period is marked by the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross' book: "Neighbors, The Destruction of Jewish community of Jedwabne, Poland" in Polish in 2000 and in English in 2001. In "Neighbors", J.T. Gross described the massacre of the local Jewish population by their Polish neighbours in the village of Jedwabne in the summer of 1941. The book was seen as highly controversial and was widely read and debated; it provoked multiple discussions about the behaviours and attitudes of non-Jewish Poles towards Jewish Poles during the Holocaust.

2.4.3 Early 2000s-2015

The publication of "Neighbours" was a 'narrative shock' in the Polish public sphere: the so-called 'Jedwabne debate' which erupted in the media, but also politics and academic and cultural circles in Poland, seemed to serve as the beginning of something new, a constructive change in how the Holocaust and Jews are remembered in Poland (Janicka and Żukowski 2016, 7–8). Numerous cultural and academic productions related to difficult memory about Jews and especially the Holocaust, contributed to furthering the discussion and bringing it to wider audiences in Poland. Among those the works of Anna Bikont (2004), Tadeusz Słobodzianek (2008) or Władysław Pasikowski (2012) might be cited. The Polish Centre for Holocaust Research was established at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, and generally academic interest in the Holocaust and Jewish history in Poland expanded rapidly (Janicka and Żukowski 2016, 8). More initiatives centred on Jewish heritage and past emerged, also in small towns, for example in Żarki, a town in southern Poland which was visited by *MoW* and is analysed in Chapters Seven and Eight in relation to this topic.

The broader context which facilitated all these developments also has to do with political changes, especially the process of Poland's application and admittance to the

European Union and NATO. In 1998 talks on Polish membership to the EU were opened, in 1999 Poland joined NATO, and in 2002 at the EU formally invited Poland to become a member in 2004 (BBC News 2017). In June 2003, almost 80 percent of the population voted for joining the EU, with close to a 60 percent voting turnout (Szczerbiak 2003). The extensive social, economic, and political changes that membership in the EU triggered are of less interest to this thesis, but changes in the memory politics are worth mentioning. The new EU member states, including Poland, created their own approach to becoming European in their politics: it was "a combination of simultaneously seeking recognition from and exercising resistance to the hegemonic 'core European' narrative of what 'Europe' is all about." (Mälksoo 2009, 655).

On the other hand, in the early 2000s, a common European framework for commemorating and educating about the Holocaust was established with the support of EU institutions, and "participation in the Holocaust community of memory became part of the entry ticket into the EU" (Assmann 2010, 102–3). The vivid and extensive 'Jedwabne debate' in Poland was thus fitting in with the larger developments in Europe regarding the importance of the Holocaust and 'working through' its complex legacy (LaCapra 2000): including collaboration with the Nazis, seizure of property, complicity, ignorance and cases of helping and rescue of Jews. At the same time, the 10 new EU members from Eastern and Southern Europe sought an extension of the narrative about WW2, so it would include not only the Holocaust and Nazi crimes but also Stalinist crimes (Littoz-Monnet 2013). With all these developments as a backdrop, Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN in Warsaw was formally established in 2005 as a public-private partnership, and over the following years the building was developed. It opened in 2013 and its first visitors were welcomed at the permanent exhibition in 2014 (POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2014).

Museum on Wheels was among the diverse educational and cultural activities developed at the institution even before it formally opened the Core Exhibition in October 2014.

2.4.4 2015-Spring 2018

Spring and Summer of 2015 was the second season of the *Museum on Wheels'* tour around Poland. This was also the campaigning period before the Presidential election in May (held every five years) and the Parliamentary elections in October (held every four years). These campaigns and elections matter because the related memory politics, including the 'Jedwabne debate', became vividly questioned and discussed again. In May 2015 while on tour with *MoW* in Szamotuły in Central Poland, I watched, together with POLIN's educators, the televised debate between two presidential candidates: Andrzej Duda and Bronisław Komorowski. The debate host, Monika Olejnik, asked a question about Poland being "often accused of participation in the Holocaust" in the international arena: whether politics of frequent apologies does not contribute to it, and whether it was the right decision of President Kaczyński a few years earlier to forbid the exhumations in Jedwabne for religious reasons, and whether this had not prevented finding out about how many people were killed there ("CZAS DECYZJI – DEBATA 2015." 2015).

In response, Komorowski, who was the President at the time, said that respecting Jewish religious traditions about the dead was important and mentioned work that is done and events that are organised to bring international guests to Poland and show them that Poles were also victims of the Nazi occupation; he also mentioned that it is crucial to remember the "uncommendable behaviours" of Poles during the war but at the same time tell stories abroad about many Poles who saved Jews (ibid.). The approach represented by the President was congruent with the memory politics being presented internationally at the time: emphasising work that is being done and the dialogue with Jewish communities in Poland and abroad, mentioning the importance of acknowledging the complexity of the

behaviours of non-Jewish Poles towards Jewish Poles during the Holocaust, but similarly emphasising that non-Jewish Poles were victims too and that many Jews received help from non-Jews in the occupied Poland. Yet, what the other presidential candidate, Andrzej Duda, who then became the President, responded, was very different and symptomatic of the new period which began in 2015.

The response of the President-to-be began with criticising his predecessor for labelling Poles "as the nation of perpetrators, [writing] that the Polish nation was also a perpetrator" (ibid.). Duda said that outcasts can be found in every nation and one cannot blame the whole nation. He then went on to assert that the Polish historical policy "should first and foremost defend our good name" (ibid.).[21] He found it unacceptable that phrases such as 'Polish concentration camps' or 'Poles are a nation of perpetrators' are used abroad and he implied that this should be punished and thought that an institution which would defend the good name of Poland is "absolutely indispensable" (ibid.). Such rhetoric marks a shift in the memory politics of the Polish government, as Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) won the parliamentary elections later that year and their approach is consistent with that of the President. In a 2016 article, historian Jan Grabowski called this strategy of constant "reminders and celebrations of Polish sacrifice at the time of the Shoah" in the governmental history policy 'the Righteous Defence' (Grabowski 2016, 484). In Chapter Eight I analyse how this emphasis on helping and saving Jews was also demonstrated in stories evoked in the context of *MoW*'s interventions in rural Poland, and what this means for the complex landscape of collective memory about Jews in Poland.

These changes to history policy are influencing both the public sphere in Poland and the European and Western world more broadly. To illustrate this, I discuss two examples below. Both are related to events which unfolded in 2018 but are connected to the overall

[21] 'our' refers to the Polish nation in this case.

change of the memory politics and the shift of the atmosphere in the public sphere regarding memory about the Holocaust and Jewish past in Poland. A third example, the introduction of a legislation which makes it illegal, under a threat of fines and jail sentence, to place responsibility or co-responsibility on Poland or Polish people for the crimes committed by Nazis (Kroet 2016), is examined in Chapter Eight.

In early January 2018, Ryszard Czarnecki, a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) representing the PiS party, compared Róża Thun, an MEP representing the Civic Platform (PO – *Platforma Obywatelska*);[22] to a *szmalcownik*, saying that she denounced her own country.[23] *Szmalcownik* is a Polish term which during WW2 referred to extortionists in occupied Warsaw who sought to identify, persecute and blackmail Jews hiding on the Aryan side, agreeing not to turn them in for a fee (Grabowski 2008; Ochayon n.d.; Roskies 2018). Czarnecki's statement was widely commented on in European Parliament and most of the voices were critical. Soon after his statement, the European People's Party submitted a case for removing Czarnecki from his role as one of the fourteen Vice-Presidents of the European parliament, while PiS politicians declared that "an attack on Czarnecki is an attack on Poland" (Sawka 2018). The voting took place on February 7th and he was removed from his term in office "due to serious misconduct" (European Parliament News 2018).[24]

Szmalcownik is not a word that is popularly known outside of Poland, apart from the circles of Holocaust scholars. Czarnecki, by referring to an opposition politician in this way, brought about discussions that would sporadically spread throughout Poland's public sphere and to the European level; where the MEPs as well as journalists and anyone who follows EU politics more closely, to understand the term had to find out more about the context of

[22]PO is a party that held majority in the previous government in Poland for two terms (2007-2015, with PSL) and had the Presidential seat for five years (2010-2015).
[23]Czarnecki was commenting on what Thun said in ARTE, a French-German television channel, where she criticised the governing party, PiS (Sawka 2018).
[24]Additionally, Thun declared in January, and again a month later, that if Czarnecki does not apologize (which he said repeatedly he would not do), she would sue Czarnecki demanding a correction and a compensation to be paid to organisations working on Polish-Jewish dialogue (Sawka 2018).

Nazi-occupied Poland and the approaches of non-Jews to Jews, including collaboration with the Nazis, denunciation of Jews and the extortion of money for the promise of protection. In that way, among others, the change of the memory politics was clearly marked on the European level and it demonstrated that the current government has a different approach to previous ones in 'redefining Poland's place in Europe': it is more about 'the good name' of the nation, while this definition of the 'nation' does not necessarily include all Polish citizens, especially if they criticise the government or disagree with the reformulated narrative about Poland during WW2 and the Holocaust.[25]

Another relevant example here is the #RespectUs campaign which was launched in February 2018. Its creators describe themselves to euronews as a grassroots initiative run by "a group of young people who love Poland" (Cuddy 2018). The initiative emerged in the context of "the international campaign of attributing co-responsibility of the Holocaust to the polish nation is one of the most shocking and scandalous events in modern history of Poland." (#RespectUs Campaign 2018); [26] the creators write that their aim is to provide information so that people (abroad) can "confront lie with truth and live in truth" (ibid.) The campaign, which sent dozens of trucks, donated by a local company, around Europe with the message: "#RespectUs. During WW2 Poles saved over 100 000 Jews", maintains that the history of the Holocaust "is being falsified" (Cuddy 2018).

The campaign goes hand-in-hand with the new law defending the 'good name of the Polish nation'; its creators are sure that "Polish trucks recalling the obvious facts from the history of the world and Poland will literally flood other European countries" (ibid.). The idea of using trucks to travel the roads of Europe to spread a message is a noteworthy example of how 'travelling memory' (Erll 2011b) works and how human agents can use

[25]The latter was demonstrated in the stances of the supporters of the new legislation introduced in January/February 2018, which is to protect the 'good name' of the nation.
[26]Original quote, the website has an English as well as Spanish language version. In both there are some spelling and language mistakes.

mobility to transfer narratives about the past across physical boundaries, as the campaign is primarily oriented towards people outside of Poland. For this initiative, spreading the message that manipulates historical narratives about the Holocaust abroad, and about how non-Jewish Poles behaved, by only providing information that promotes 'the good name of Polish nation', is a mode of supporting changes to memory politics in Poland.

Although I did not conduct fieldwork during *MoW* tours in 2017 and 2018, discussing these more recent developments is essential for providing the broader context in which I conducted the analysis of POLIN's travelling museum. My division of the timeframe into these four periods is, apart from the first, subjective and based on my own observations and academic literature consulted. In the thesis I refer to these periods to explain the changes in remembering Jews and treating Jewish heritage in Poland, and they are useful for connecting the experiences of my interviewees with the wider political and social developments in Poland over the past decades. Furthermore, this thesis helps to decipher the complex memory landscape of Poland post-2015, situating it in an understanding of the developments in the previous decades and therefore the overview of the timeframe used is necessary.

2.5 POLIN and new museology

As is further explained in the Literature Review, starting in 1970s, the development of new approaches in museology has transformed the ways in which museums work and how they engage with their audiences. Openness, inclusiveness and participation as well as orientation towards people: visitors or members of communities to which the institutions seek to contribute, became central values promoted in museums' discourses (Arnold-de-Simine 2013; Kidd 2014; Macdonald 2011; N. Simon 2010). In Poland, a number of "modern museums", as they refer to themselves and are described in academic discourse and in the media, has been created since the early 2000s (Gócza 2018, Kobielska 2017). These museums focus on "creating experience" (Kobielska 2017, 207) and are usually located in

large urban centres – Warsaw, Katowice, Gdańsk. Most of them deal with identity-related topics: narratives about WW2, Solidarity movement, the Warsaw Uprising, minorities, and this makes them prone to being used in political struggles.[27] The first among these museums, the Museum of the Warsaw Rising, opened in 2004 and its exhibition "was based on constructing a patriotic national myth of Polishness, with the aim of strengthening and disseminating this myth to a broad public" (Gócza 2018).

POLIN in Warsaw also positions itself[28] as a "modern museum" ("Mission and Vision" n.d.) through its message, exhibitions and a range of educational, cultural and research activities. Employing the approaches and methods promoted by new museology, POLIN seeks to contribute to the contentious and complex discussions about Polish/Jewish past in Poland and abroad. In the post-communist Poland, where public museums are crucial elements of political agendas used in constructing memory politics (Kobielska 2017, 218), the work of POLIN does not remain free from political struggles. As a public-private partnership, the museum is partly dependent on governmental funding but some of its work, such as the Jewish Cultural Project, of which *MoW* is a part, comes from international grants. The museum navigates in its work between its own aims and mission and the aims and interests of its funders.

The Jewish Cultural Heritage (JCH) Project received funding from EEA and Norway Grants in the 2013-2017 round and after a review it has been confirmed that the funding is to be continued until 2021 (POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2017, Ministerstwo Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego 2018). The overall objective of the funders, EEA and

[27]One example of this are the developments related to the Museum of WW2 which opened in Gdańsk in 2016. The PiS government accuses the museum of insufficiently addressing 'the Polish experience' of the war and being too 'universalistic'. The government merged the institution with another small museum and in that way the WW2 Museum director, Paweł Machcewicz who did not agree with government's criticism, was laid off (Gnauck 2017) and elements of the exhibitions were changed.

[28]I am aware that a museum does not have agency as such. By referring to a museum as an institution that 'does things' I imply that the agency for the actions is in the hands of people who work in or for the museum in various positions and who are situated and embedded in multiple relationships and power assemblages.

Norway Grants is "to reduce social and economic disparities and strengthen bilateral relations" between the donor states: Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway and the 15 beneficiary states, including Poland (EEA Grants and Norway Grants 2019a). JCH Project in Poland aimed to "foster a society that is open and tolerant, and combats against intolerance, anti-Semitism, exclusion, and entrenching of negative stereotyping"[29] and, according to the project's description on the funders website, it targeted children and young people (EEA Grants and Norway Grants 2019b). The summary of project results suggests that these aims were achieved, yet the focus in the description is short-term and quantitative: the topics of educational activities are listed and the number of mentions of cultural activities that took place during its duration and of people who participated are highlighted (ibid).[30] *Museum on Wheels,* as part of the JCH, was shaped by the donor's agenda and the EEA and Norway Grants' focus on quantitative results.

Returning to the narrative of POLIN Museum more broadly, the institution defines its social relevance in relation to the socio-political situation in Poland, and internationally, by focusing on migration, cultural diversity, antisemitism, and prejudice. The mission of the Museum is: "to recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews, contributing to the mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world" ("Mission and Vision" n.d.).[31] Such an understanding of POLIN's role corresponds with the premise of new museology, which asserts the museums' significance in promoting respect for differences, creating cross-cultural understanding and dealing with prejudice (Sandell and Nightingale 2012), as well as providing a means to include and give voice to previously excluded individuals or groups (Crooke 2011). POLIN connects current

[29] This is the original quote found on the website in English.
[30]If one consults the materials available on the EEA and Norway Grants website (eeagrants.org) about other projects they already funded or are contributing to currently around Europe, it becomes clear that the focus on quantitative results prevails in assessing the value of projects.
[31]The story presented by the museum includes Jews 'in' Poland and 'of' Poland. The transnational aspect is particularly crucial here as it is estimated that 70 percent of the 13 million Jews in the world today have ancestors who once lived in the historic territory of Poland (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015b, 264).

issues to the past, it describes itself as "an educational and cultural center, a platform for social dialogue; an institution offering a profound, transformative experience and promoting new standards of relating to history" ("Mission and Vision" n.d.).

In one of the interviews, Dariusz Stola, the Director of POLIN Museum, said: "our [permanent] exhibition presents a lot of artefacts, pictures, quotes, but it leaves space for the visitors to select threads which attract their interest" (Pałys 2016).[32] As in many museums guided by new museology, POLIN assumes that visitors take an active role in interacting with the museum. The museum recognises that what is presented in the exhibitions and programmes may be difficult for the visitors because it challenges what they think they know:

> we start from the premise that visitors come to the museum open to the experience, in good faith, and that they are interested and intelligent. Some are well informed, others know nothing, and the exhibition will challenge what many people think they know. We count on visitors to discuss, debate, agree or disagree – and to come away better informed, curious, and hopefully more open. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015a, 158)

However, the ways in which the museum acknowledges the diversity of visitor's engagment with the institution's work are limited. POLIN, in line with the quantifiable approach embraced by many of the cultural institutions and their funders in the 21st century, assigns high importance to numbers: of visitors in the museum or participating in its activities, of level of satisfaction declared in surveys filled out after visiting the exhibition, or of number of encouraging and enthusiastic notes left at departure by visitors.[33] This thesis shows that a qualitative analysis of visitors' responses to the museum's projects reveals a more complex

[32]Interestingly, here the director uses the term *zwiedzający,* which in Polish language refers primarily to tourist visitors visiting monuments, which could perhaps be a more tightly organized and formal activity. The word that is closer to the meaning of museum visitor in English would be *odwiedzający,* which denotes paying a visit as a more casual and informal activity. In the whole interview, Stola uses the former in majority of cases. He mentions the latter as well, but only when referring to visitor numbers each year.

[33]For example, the Director, in an interview conducted for an on-line platform in 2016, explained how the museum evaluates the satisfaction of its visitors by emphasizing the number of visitors in comparison to other museums in Warsaw, and mentioning the percentage of visitors who would recommend the museum to their friends and family according to survey responses (Pałys 2016).

picture of engagements with the museum, pointing at a tension between POLIN's narrative and collective memory about Jews on the vernacular level.

POLIN Museum seeks to become a museum that stands out from the larger crowd of Jewish museums Europe. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, the Program Director of the Core Exhibition for the museum, explains that POLIN was not established to be 'the Jewish Museum Warsaw', and by this it questions what constitutes a 'Jewish Museum' in contemporary Europe (2015b, 264). Using new museology, POLIN seeks to re-shape how Polish/Jewish past is narrated both in Poland and abroad. For Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "the history of Polish Jews, one of several minorities that formed part of the fabric of Poland throughout most of its history, is a way to recover Poland's historic diversity" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015b, 278).

There is a particular agenda that frames the museum's programmes, including *MoW*, which emphasises the continuity of Jewish life and connects the story of Jewish presence in Poland to issues that are seen as relevant to our present-day society, such as discrimination, prejudice, antisemitism and migration. Namely, the institution promotes itself as 'a Museum of life' emphasising the one thousand-year-long Jewish presence on Polish territories (POLIN Museum 2016). On one hand the idea is "to resist an overwhelming teleological narrative driving inexorably to the Holocaust as an inevitable endpoint for the preceding millennium of Jewish history" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015b, 273). The Holocaust as a disastrous event is an important element of the presented content, "but the story does not end there" (ibid.). On the other, the museum aims to convince the visitors that "Jews were part of the texture of Polish life" (Rosman 2012, 373).[34]

The activities and the focus of the museum, however, does not always correspond with the vision of memory politics that the right-wing Law and Justice government, which is in

[34]The religious life is not singled out but integrated into the narrative as a changing and adaptable element of Jewish life.

power since 2015, has. Jarosław Sellin, Vice-Minister of Culture, stated in an interview for a public TV channel: "we have some objections about the museum's involvement in all sorts of tensions of, nevertheless, political character" (Karpiński 2018). Among the tensions which the government representative had in mind were, probably, the discussions around the 2018 legislation which was supposed to punish for placing responsibility on Poland or Polish people for the crimes committed by the Nazis.[35] The museum was one of the institutions which voiced their criticism of the law and warned about its potential consequences for discussions, education and research about Polish/Jewish past in Poland and abroad (POLIN 2018b).[36]

Another example is the exhibition entitled "Estranged. March '68 and its Aftermath" on the 1968 antisemitic government-sponsored campaign which closed with a wall of quotes bringing together xenophobic and antisemitic remarks from 1968 and 2018. The exhibition was overwhelmingly successful and widely debated in Poland and abroad, but some commentators believe that the exhibition outraged the government (Gessen 2019). Dariusz Stola's term ran out in February 2019 and even though he won the competition to become the Director again, as of October 2019 he is still waiting to be re-appointed by the Minister of Culture. Since the museum is run by three entities: the city of Warsaw, the Polish national government and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, the government cannot singlehandedly select the director, but the Minister needs to formally appoint the director to take his post and this has not yet happened (Gessen 2019).

[35] More on this law, its background and consequences of its introduction, can be found in Chapter Eight.
[36]Then, in an interview from 2018, the museum's director, Dariusz Stola, mentioned this legislation as a factor responsible for a sudden increase in antisemitic and hateful voices criticising the work of the museum (Karpiński 2018).

2.6 POLIN on tour: *MoW*

Museum on Wheels consists of a transportable pavilion[37] with generic and localized exhibition elements (Figure 1 and 2), and a team of five staff: a coordinator,[38] two educators and two technical assistants. It had its first tour in the summer of 2014, few months before POLIN Museum opened officially in Warsaw in October that year. Since then, every year for two to four months it has been travelling around Poland visiting, until 2017, more than 70 small towns, villages and a few larger towns and cities (POLIN Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich 2017, 36–39). The project is one of the initiatives of the Jewish Cultural Heritage Project (JCH), for which the Museum received 4.3 million euros of funding from the Norway and European Economic Area (EEA) Grants from Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway for the years 2013-2017 (POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2017). Besides *Museum on Wheels* it included various other educational activities for diverse age groups in Warsaw and beyond, such as workshops, conferences, awareness-raising campaigns or oral history projects, but also on-line platforms, live lessons broadcasted from POLIN Museum and films (ibid.).[39] With its aims and included activities, *Museum on Wheels* fits into the broader approach of POLIN Museum as a 'Museum of life' which invites visitors to contribute to the institution's work in various ways.

The goals of the itinerant museum from its inception were articulated as reaching out to communities "that have inhibited access to the resources of the Museum of the History of

[37]The mobile component is a pavilion measuring 6 over 7.5m, a large cube with a small terrace. It is transported by a large truck between locations.
[38]I use the term 'coordinator' to refer to one of the two or three (depending on the year) full-time employees of POLIN whose job was to prepare, manage, promote or administrate financially the *Museum on Wheels*. Each of the employees had a different job title, but for the sake of simplicity I refer to all of them as 'coordinators'.
[39]The Jewish Cultural Heritage project included specifically: workshops for school students, live lessons from POLIN broadcasted in classrooms around Poland, educational film on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, school exchange with Norwegian students, professional development for teachers, the Daffodil Campaign to recall the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Poland, *Museum on Wheels'* three years tour, a lifelong learning program in Warsaw, book publications, an exhibition Biographies of Things, conferences, online platforms (The Virtual Shtetl, The Polish Righteous, Jewish Warsaw) and an oral history project (POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2017).

Polish Jews" (Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2013, 4).[40] The application submitted to the donor: EEA and Norway Grants, stated: "The mobile pavilion will bring to selected municipalities in Poland a multimedia exhibition telling a story - similarly to the permanent exhibition of the museum – of the centuries-long coexistence of the Polish and Jewish culture." (Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2013, 4). Meaningfully for this thesis, in such formulation of *MoW*'s aim 'Poles' and 'Jews' are presented as two separate groups.

On the other hand, the wording of POLIN's organisers on this issue has evolved throughout the years of the project's existence. In a presentation given to local activists working with POLIN during the 2017 tour, one of the coordinators at POLIN stressed that the project was about the history of Polish Jews and that it seeks to revive the memory about Polish Jews.[41] Furthermore, the content of *MoW*'s exhibition, and often the stories offered by the educators who guide participants through the pavilion, emphasised the complexity of Jewish identity in the particular Polish context, allowing for more diverse understandings of group identities than seeing them as simply 'Poles' or 'Jews'. The encounters of locals with these stories are explored in this thesis.

Towns of 50,000 inhabitants or less were the target locations, and every year since 2014 POLIN announced one or more call for applications to host *MoW*, to which local organisations and individuals were invited to respond.[42] Between 2014 and 2017, the local organisers were expected to propose two or more events to be organized in their municipality to accompany *MoW*'s visits. Once the organisers at POLIN selected the towns which the project would visit in a given year, the local activist(s), either one or two, worked together

[40]The application was created in 2013, when the Museum used the first version if its name which did not include POLIN. Gradually the amended name gained prevalence and in 2015 when I gathered most of the ethnographic data for this PhD, the name that the Museum's employees used included 'POLIN': The Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN.
[41]The words 'Polish' are italicised to note the stress which the coordinator has placed while speaking. Instead of talking about 'Poles' and 'Jews', she focused on Polish Jews.
[42]Applications could be made only from the regions (voivodships) that are part of the competition in any given year, for instance in 2014 applications were open for municipalities from Eastern part of Poland, while in 2015 it was Western and Northern part.

with *MoW* coordinators to plan and promote the project. A few months before the pavilion started touring, the local activists whose towns were to be visited were invited for a one or two-day training course in Warsaw at the museum, during which they learned about *MoW*, POLIN Museum, discussed their fears and challenges, talked about plans for local events and had a chance to walk through POLIN's permanent exhibition. Local activists were employed on a project basis by the museum and received some remuneration for their work; their main role was to plan and coordinate local accompanying events and to take care of some of the logistical arrangements before and during the visit of *MoW*.[43] The locals involved were granted much independence in planning and running the local events once the committee at POLIN chose their proposal to organise these. POLIN's employees did monitor the progress in planning and changes proposed, but the eventual coordination of these events remained in the hands of the local activists.

[43]Every year the responsibilities of the local coordinators evolved, for example in the first year (2014) their role in local promotion was limited, but in the following years they received more and more autonomy and responsibility in promoting the event in local media.

Figure 2: Inside of the pavilion: visitors having a conversation over the interactive map of their town and (in the background) others reading brochures about the project. The panels on the wall on the left present languages used by the Jewish community in Poland in the interwar period and the wooden cube in front of it has Hebrew letters related to Jewish holidays on it that children can copy with crayons (here letter *shin* for Rosh Hashanah). Other panels and elements visible here are shown again in Figures 5-8. Piotrków Trybunalski, June 2014. Photo taken by POLIN Museum's staff for POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Downloaded from the Facebook page of *MoW* and used with the permission of the museum.

CHAPTER THREE Literature review

This literature review draws a link between theories of memory situated within the social sciences and humanities, and developments in museum studies in the early 21st century. It defines the notion of 'collective memory' applied in this research and explains why studying collective memory on the vernacular level is of central importance for this thesis. The lens of 'memory' is used to explore mobilisations of the past as events in which a storyteller (individual, institutional agent, journalist, museum), who is embedded in relationships and in political, cultural, social and economic contexts, takes an active role in shaping the story about the past in the present. Stories play a significant role in how individuals situate themselves in society, so consequently to how they relate to collective memory and museums, because "it is through our stories that we construct ourselves as part of our world" (Brockmeier and Harre 2001, 54). Furthermore, stories are fundamental to *Museum on Wheels*: it is a museum outreach project which relies on storytelling as a way of inviting productive reception. The educators tell stories about Jews and encourage visitors to become storytellers themselves both in the museum pavilion and outside. The central tension I identify in this thesis is also connected to stories and storytelling: for collective memory on the vernacular level, stories are rooted in a preoccupation with Jewish absence, while the stories told by the museum stem from the objective of highlighting the continuity of Jewish life and presence in Poland over the centuries.

This chapter provides a background for my analysis of POLIN's travelling initiative as a project that interacted with audiences and actors on the local level, using a collaborative approach to engage with difficult memory about Jewish/Polish past. By 'collaborative approach' I mean inviting various people, groups and communities to contribute with their stories, knowledge and ideas to creating the museum's visit in each town and making the program suitable to local needs. Collaboration, however, is a multi-layered concept which I

consider central to how *Museum on Wheels* functioned. I therefore also discuss the various meanings of the term and its importance for this thesis in this chapter.

In its programme, *Museum on Wheels* focused on highlighting how the Jewish minority constituted a significant part of Poland's demographic composition until the Holocaust, and it showed that although Jews are almost entirely absent in early 21st century Poland, they remain significant part of Polish culture and history. Consequentially, it encouraged inhabitants of small towns to reconsider what and how they know about the past in Poland and supported local activists in protecting and promoting Jewish heritage (POLIN 2018a). Because narratives about Jews in rural Poland have for decades been contentious and complicated, carrying strong affective potential (Kapralski 2011; Tokarska-Bakir 2013), I refer to them as difficult memory, a term I define in this chapter. I situate POLIN's project within wider developments of the museum sector by exploring connections between memory and storytelling, paying particular attention to the notion of difficulty in the museum context, including museum programs, politics, strategies, and communication with various actors, such as funders, curators, journalists, and visitors.

3.2 Exploring memory in the museum context

Memory has often been defined as the representation or articulation of the past in the present (Huyssen 2012; Rigney 2005), or simply as the past made present (Terdiman 1993). While some academics conceive of memory in opposition to history (Assmann and Shortt 2011; Le Goff 1992; Nora 1989), others describe it as "different models of remembering in culture" (Erll 2008, 7).[44] The latter understanding of memory is more conducive to this research because it allows to conceive of history and memory as diverse forms of articulating the past in the present, in which history is a one particular way of remembering with its own internal,

[44]Erll conceptualizes cultural memory as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Erll 2008, 2). While this definition may be very broad, it also allows to encompass multiple phenomena on various levels (individual, social, national, transnational, etc.) as well as forms of memory articulated through language and those expressed through other systems of signs.

epistemological rules. Following Jens Brockmeier (2015, 20), memory is defined as "an activity, a social, discursive, and cultural practice". It is concerned with the past but occurs in the present (Terdiman 1993).

The individual level of memory is inextricably intertwined with the social: it emerges through social interactions, "evolving through continual and reciprocal dialogue between social individuals" (Gensburger 2016, 404); it is "the product of the social environment experienced by the individual" (Gensburger 2016, 403). That memory is collective means that individuals share assumptions about the particular elements they expect from a given narrative, or any other articulation of past events (Kubica and Van de Putte 2016). In other words, if one understands memory as a cultural system, following Barry Schwartz (1996), and culture as defined by Clifford Geertz - "an organization of symbolic patterns on which people rely to make sense of their experience" (in: Schwartz 1996, 909)-, these assumptions can serve as the symbolic patterns. In this thesis it is useful to conceive of collective memory as a cultural system, because making this connection allows to see memory as part of the broader relations and practices that shape societies.

In the thesis, I explore both the social environment and the individual level of collective memory. To explore the former, I analyse the museum as an institution embedded in various relationships and involved in evoking stories which are to provide collective memory narratives for certain communities. For the latter, on an individual level, I consider the individuals' embeddedness in narratives about the past by examining how personal reactions to a museum's project interact with the narratives of the museum and other institutions and media. Here, the term 'vernacular' is crucial. Vernacular in this thesis is understood as local, everyday, informal, as opposed to institutional and official. The study of *Museum on Wheels* brings attention to the vernacular level of collective memory, where the visitors, local activists, and others who interact with the museum, use their own experiences,

knowledge and perceptions to construct responses to the official and institutionalised narratives presented by the museum and its staff.

In the following sections I review the theoretical approaches to memory and museums which were developed to examine collective memory on various levels, in order to situate my approach within the wider academic literature. I examine the theories of memory and approaches to museums as mnemonic institutions using two metaphors: the storehouse and the storyteller. Originally, Janice Haaken (1998) used these metaphors to explore the understandings of memory in psychology; she differentiated between memory as a storehouse, comprising of "mental images accumulated over time and subject to decay or erosion" (Haaken 1998, 43) and memory as a storyteller, emphasising the rootedness of memory in the framework of narratives and social relations (ibid.). I do not treat this distinction as a defining framework, but rather, it provides indicative orientation points with which to navigate between the numerous ways in which collective memory and museums are theorized. Admittedly, elements of storehouse and storyteller approaches are often combined in these theories and in museum practice.

3.2.1 Between storehouse and storyteller

In the 1920s, Maurice Halbwachs brought to attention the social dimension of the phenomenon of memory, "no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (Halbwachs 1992, 43). He coined the term collective memory to denote articulations of the past that are capable of enduring in the consciousness of a given group,[45] but which, in order to endure, require the agency of individuals.[46] Pierre Nora similarly refers to memory as a collective phenomenon concentrating on *lieux de memoire* (realms of memory) defined as any entities, material or

[45]The movement of memory between different temporalities and locations, or in his words 'evoking historical memory in indirect ways', can occur for individuals by reading or listening and by commemorative events which bring the group together.

[46] I follow Brubaker (2004) in perceiving collectives as not naturally given but humanly constructed, subjective categories.

non-material, which "have become symbolic elements of the memorial heritage of any community" (1989, xvii). Nora's approach includes some elements of understanding memory using the storehouse metaphor, as it concentrates on the ways in which collective memory is constantly re-produced by members of a given group. The group guards the collective memory, performs it, engages with it, and only in this way can the past be 'retrieved' in the present. In this way, so what is or can be preserved is always flawed. Such a plenitude-loss view on collective memory results in "chronic frustration because always falling short of total recall" (Rigney 2005, 12). Memories are not a matter of 'retrieving' something from an archive of images or experiences, they are experiences which occur in the present (Terdiman 1993; Brockmeier 2015). For this thesis it is more productive to consider how the past is articulated in the present through interactions, and how and why certain narratives are transferred between groups, cultures, and temporalities.

Nonetheless, conceiving of collective memory through a storehouse metaphor is certainly helpful for explaining how museums emerged: the museum was established as an institution engaged in collecting, including assembling, preserving, and displaying collections (Macdonald 2011, 207). Initially it was created as superior to the public, "it was established to 'raise' the level of public understanding, to 'elevate' the spirits of its visitors, and to 'refine' and 'uplift' the common taste" (Weil 2007, 32). It only became accessible to a wider audience, those outside the aristocracy, in the 19th century, with the rise of national museums (Woodward 2012, 15) and modern nationalism more broadly.[47] Museums, together with censuses and maps, emerged as key modes for the nation-state to promote its nationalist ideologies, discourses and practices of national belonging and identity (Anderson 1991).

Storehouse understandings of collective memory and museums establish essential foundations for the analysis of memory at the intersection between the individual and social

[47]Tony Bennnett describes how museums and high culture in general became assigned by the government "the purpose of civilizing the population as a whole" (1995, 19).

levels, and they show that the museum, as an institution, was from its inception supposed to connect the two levels. For this thesis it is important to consider the collecting function of the museum which, even in new museology, remains vital to how museums represent themselves and how they are perceived (Crane 2000). Viewing the museum as a storehouse to which individuals and organisations can contribute their stories or objects, and as a place that guards and protects them from being forgotten, remains influential among some members of the public. In this 'common-sense' understanding, the museum is considered an institution that is to "perform the externalized function of their [individuals'] own brains: it remembers, for them, what is most valuable and essential in culture and science" (Crane 2011, 243).

Unlike the storehouse idea, the storyteller emphasises the interactive processes embedded in, and articulated through, narratives and social relationships, thus allowing to particularly concentrate on agency, change, mobility and affective potential connected to collective memory. It makes 'grasping' memory, and consequentially researching it, more challenging, because transformation, interactivity and mobility are inherent to the articulations, circulations and transfers of memory. At the same time, it allows to position the individual at the centre, where he or she becomes a storyteller articulating narratives about the past. The growing influence of poststructuralist arguments, especially from the writings of Michael Foucault and Jacques Derrida, in late 20th century marked a shift in focus "from memory as an entity to a process, a liquid and ever-changing reality" (Brockmeier 2015, 35). Mnemonic institutions are also drifting away from the storehouse: "the long-established habit of imagining memory as a storehouse has been transmuted into the reverse suggestion that storage systems [such as the museum] might be understood as forms of memory" (Cubitt 2007, 8).

Since the gradual emergence of new museology in 1970s, museums are increasingly aware of their social relevance (Woodward 2012) and they seek to become more inclusive

and participatory in the curatorial process and programme building (N. Simon 2010; Lehrer, Milton, and Patterson 2011). The storyteller metaphor in which memory is not fixed, but emerges through processes and interactions, is evident in the trajectory of museums that became storytellers and "have become places of recollection, not so much driven by objects but by narratives and performances" (Arnold-de-Simine 2013, 2). Finally, in my approach to collaborative museum-making, seeing museums, visitors and other actors who engage with museums as storytellers, allows me to emphasise the importance of the interactions which shape how collaborative museum projects are made. In the next section I explore how, in the context of the developments in museology over the last decades, museums incorporate difficult past into their stories, because difficult elements of collective memory are something that, explicitly or not, *Museum on Wheels* engages with.

3.2.2 Storytelling and difficult memory

In storyteller approaches, emotions and human relationships, as the main themes emphasised in storytelling traditions, play an important role in the study of memory in the context of "human project of meaning making" (Haaken 1998, 44). Retained knowledge is considered contingent upon relations, and "oriented toward 'hooking things together' through narratives" (ibid., 45). Haaken's observation that "stories are important forms of interpersonal exchange, conveying information about internal concerns and desires even as they stimulate states of mind in the listener" (ibid., 54) is significant if the affective potential of memory is considered. Paying attention to the choice of narratives used to construct stories can facilitate an understanding of how individuals, as well as institutional, cultural or political agents, identify themselves, what they attribute meaning to, and why. Storytelling is essentially a social activity and importantly "stories are at once raw material and the cultural product of memory" (Scott 2011, 205). Stories emerge in particular cultural contexts; thus,

they are products of collective memory, but at the same time once they are told they also become inspirations and templates for, or elements of, other stories.

Storytelling is not only about the one who tells the story, but also about the ones who listen to it. Listening, reception, is an active and transforming process which makes storytelling an interactive experience: "the storyteller takes what he tells from experiences – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (Benjamin 2006, 364). The individual who engages with past in the present becomes a storyteller, who through the narratives that he or she has available creates stories in interactions with others, drawing on various media. Stories are articulations of collective memory on the individual level, but they are also the precise meaning of being 'in the world' as a human, interacting with others (Arendt 1958).[48]

Although one could examine a number of memory studies theories which define memory according to the storyteller concept (Erll 2011a; Gensburger 2016; Hirsch 2012; Rigney 2005; Rothberg 2009), I choose another way to explore the connection between stories, memory and museums. My focus in this section rests on the notion of difficulty, which in the museum context is intrinsically linked to memory and, consequently, to the individuals' affective experiences. I see 'affective experiences' as a general term referring to emotions, feelings and affects. Although some scholars (for example: Massumi 1995; Shouse 2005) differentiate between them, here the terms 'affect', 'emotion' and 'feeling' are used interchangeably to identify a range of relational intensities between people (Kostogriz 2012, 402).

The concept of 'difficult memory' is chosen to address a whole range of complex affective experiences in the museum, which can be related to evoking controversial, troublesome, challenging, upsetting or painful pasts. In museum studies other terms are also

[48]For Hannah Arendt, what makes us human are speech and action "and the least tangible and most ephemeral man-made 'products' are the deeds and stories which are their outcome" (Arendt 1958: in Scott 2011, 204).

used: ‘difficult matters’ (Silvén and Bjorklünd 2006; Silvén 2010; Tinning 2017), ‘difficult knowledge’ (Bonnell and Simon 2007; R. I. Simon 2011; Lehrer and Milton 2011) or ‘difficult histories’ (Rose 2016), among others. What these different concepts have in common is an assumption that there are issues that are ignored or neglected by public life (Tinning 2017, 5). As Katrine Tinning notes “museums have an ethical responsibility for representing these [difficult] matters in their exhibitions, because museums—as societal institutions— must be representative of all kinds of experiences and events in society.” (2017, 5). I propose widening Tinning’s classification to include not only exhibitions but museum engagements with society in general. For my particular case, this would mean POLIN Museum would have the ethical responsibility as to how encounters with difficult memory are facilitated in the space of the travelling museum and during events run by POLIN as part of *MoW*. This of course implicates the exhibition and its encounters with educators in the pavilion setting and during workshops, but it also incorporates the local events run by activists who collaborated with POLIN Museum. To date, the exploration of how the notion of difficulty informs the aims and approaches used in museum projects and exhibitions has been limited and is only slowly developing in scholarly literature (Bonell and Simon 2007; Witcomb 2013). Yet, the analyses provided by Jennifer Bonell and Robert Simon and Andrea Witcomb offer an excellent starting point to exploring the notion of difficulty in the museum in relation to this thesis.

Bonell and Simon (2007) identify difficulty as emerging in the personal, intimate encounter between the individual and the exhibition, which “offers visitors the potential for insight that may support new ways of relating with and within the world around them.” (2007, 66). The experience of difficulty lays in the attempts to create meaning in the relationship between the stories presented in the museum exhibition or program, and the visitor (ibid., 67). In other words, the core is located in

> the indeterminate yet potentially problematic relation between affective force provoked within the experience of an exhibition and the possible sense one might make of one's experience of this force in relation to one's understanding of an exhibition's images, artefacts, texts, and sounds (R. I. Simon 2011, 195).

Difficulty engages both cognitive and affective elements of the visitors' experience and poses substantial challenges to "their interpretative abilities" (Bonell and Simon 2007, 67), for instance by offering a more multi-layered and unambiguous story than the visitors know so far. Andrea Witcomb adds that exhibitions that are difficult aim to challenge visitors to "work poetically to provoke unsettlement in their viewers by playing with their collective memories (…) challenging them to rethink who they think they are" (2013, 256). This resonates with the work done by *Museum on Wheels*, which in its exhibition and program conveys stories of lost cultural and religious diversity in Polish towns with its many complexities. In Chapters Six to Eight of this thesis, I show how on the local level *MoW* evokes a variety of affective responses, from anxiety to fear, anger, shame or grief to nostalgia and empathy.

Crucially, the exhibitions engaging with difficulty may be able to provoke transformative learning (Bonell and Simon 2007). This requires the creation of possibilities of intimate interactions, which "solicit visitors into a 'difficult' engagement with the experiences of others that radically calls into question the adequacy of one's concepts to tie down the significance of lessons of the past" (Bonell and Simon 2007, 81). This brings a potential for engaging in a museum practice which, instead of addressing the question of what we need to remember from the past in the present, encourages us to reflect on "what it means, in light of the experience of the past, to be what we are now (and, perhaps more significantly, how we might be in the future)." (ibid.). Thinking along this vein, the aims and practices employed by POLIN in creating the travelling project can be read as establishing a potential for transformative learning, as *MoW* seeks to challenge what and how visitors remember about local past and how this interacts with their local, national or religious

identity. However, the difficulty and potential for transformative learning does not lie solely in the content of the message conveyed by a museum project.

Transformative learning takes place when visitors perform some form of emotional and intellectual labour, approaching the exhibition or project with curiosity and "a willingness to engage with a certain opaqueness or to accept that meaning is not reduced to information or instantly available" (Witcomb 2013, 267). The in-depth engagement of visitors with difficult exhibitions, according to Andrea Witcomb, can be achieved only by involving affective forms of knowledge.[49] Affective knowledge is gained through affective experience, in which involuntary memory is invoked, revealing the tension between the past and the present through "the shock of recognizing something as other than what you thought it was" (ibid., 269). In the case of *Museum on Wheels*, as I explained in the Introduction, the difficult memory which is invoked in the interactions with the itinerant museum relates to Polish/Jewish past and its connections to the present.

For conveying difficult memory in the museum, focusing on the individual experience is one of the main strategies used (Andermann and Arnold-de-Simine 2012). The position of the individual and her or his story is also significant for museums more broadly, in providing an interactive and participatory involvement for visitors (Arnold-de-Simine 2013; Kidd 2014). In particular, memory museums seek to offer visitors the possibility of accessing the past "through the eyes of individuals and their personal memories", often utilizing autobiographical storytelling (Arnold-de-Simine 2013, 10, 13). Personal stories are conveyed using transmedia storytelling, where the narrative is extended across numerous platforms. The story that each individual visitor constructs for himself or herself in the museum depends on which media they engage with (Jenkins 2011). The active role of the

[49]Following Walter Benjamin, she gives an example of art as a means to encourage affective forms of response as opposed to information presented in narrative exhibitions, which does not necessarily require critical engagement (Witcomb 2013, 268).

visitor is implied – he or she is expected to create his or her own story by engaging with multiple media and narratives.

In *Museum on Wheels*, the stories presented and ways of presenting them in the pavilion were selected to appeal to members of various generations: children could hear or read stories about Jewish holidays or traditions, and adults could find out about the history of Jews in Poland and in their town – e.g. through excerpts from personal accounts of Jews from 1920s and from 2000s or video recordings of interviews with Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. There were no personal accounts used from earlier than the first decades of the 20th century, and the rationale for this, POLIN's staff told me, was to focus on stories which people who visit can connect to because they lived in similar times: for instance, quotes about children's rhymes and games from the 1920s and 30s were incorporated with the hope that the oldest generation of visitors would recognise them from their own childhood, and in fact some of them did. The decision to select stories which explicitly referred to the experiences of potential visitors was built on the assumption of the active role of those who came to the museum. In relation to this, the following section explores the reception of memory in the museum to establish a framework to examine the engagement of the museum visitor as an 'active listener' with individual agency, who can engage with difficult memory and interpret narratives and create her or his own story.

3.3 The vernacular level of collective memory

So far, many of the widely cited works of memory studies focus on policies or cultural products such as books, films, and museum exhibitions, without examining how audiences engage with them[50]. In this thesis I use a sociological approach to memory seen as emerging through social interactions (Gensburger 2016) to bring attention to individuals and their role in collaborative museum-making, and by extension also in creating collective memory. In

[50]See for example: Alison Landsberg (2004), Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2006) or Michael Rothberg (2009).

this thesis I combine the examination of the individual experience with an analysis of relationships and social, cultural and political contexts, in which the narratives about the past and their articulations are embedded. Considering museums, and particularly the paradigm of new museology (Vergo 1989), the experience of visitors as individuals and as members of a community,[51] group, or nation at which the institution's work is targeted, is one of the main elements contributing to how institutions define their role and relevance. Museums have become 'people-centred' in recent years (Kidd 2014). In this section I review the relevant work on the role in individuals in shaping collective memory narratives in memory studies and museum studies. Through this, I outline how the interplay between the institutional and vernacular level of collective memory is explored in this thesis.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill observes that "where in the past collections were researched, now audiences are also being researched; the balance of power in museums is shifting from those who care for objects and include, and often prioritise, those who care for people" (2013, 1). Researching visitors – members (or not) of the target audience who visit the museum -, as well as users who engage with the museum virtually through on-line platforms, and participants who join activities organised by the museum, is a growing field within museum studies (Hooper-Greenhill 2013; Lang, Reeve, and Woollard 2007). Particularly, the work of John H. Falk and Lynn D. Dierking (1992, 2000, 2016) is worth noting for their ground-breaking research which began in the 1980s. Their work focuses on visitors' identities and motivations, as well as the importance of socio-cultural contexts and the function of museums within society. The second, revised edition of one of their pioneering books was published to support museum professionals in "understanding of the

[51]Community is defined by sociologists and anthropologists in multiple ways, though many tend to focus on "some combination of small-scale, relative boundedness, strong affective ties, traditionalism, and face-to-face contact", However, in the context of technological developments of the twentieth century, many also emphasize the importance of "practices and technologies that permit the creation of affective bonds that extend beyond the face-to-face contact of traditional communities" (Calhoun 2002).

museum visitor experience" (2016, 17) and help them to create institutions which "fit into their communities and are used by the public to satisfy their needs and interests" (2016, 15).

Visitors are consumers of the content presented to them (Lang, Reeve, and Woollard 2007), but they are also active producers of their particular encounter with memory in the museum. The idea that visitors are actively engaging in the reception process can be traced back to active audience theory in media studies (Hall 1973, 1980; Morley 1993). In a museum guided by the framework of new museology, reception emerges as a productive process in which visitors/consumers with their individual, yet context-shaped, identities and abilities engage in encounters with stories, artefacts and other people in a museum setting. This active role of visitors is what I focus on in exploring collaborative museum-making.

Kate Pontin notes that a broad range of evaluative work has been produced as a consequence of the development of education in museums. However, she suggests that even though there is plenty of good practice, "there is still considerable progress needed in evaluation technique, use and understanding within museums" (2007, 117). Very often projects of museums are evaluated to 'prove their worth' to funders such as governmental organisations or foundations. However, I agree with Pontin that evaluation should do more than simply demonstrate to stakeholders (such as funders and political or cultural actors influencing the work of a museum) that a particular project 'fits' their policies (Pontin 2007, 118). She recommends qualitative analysis, and "collaboration and sharing experience, knowledge and best practice" (ibid., 125). This thesis does not aim to provide a *sensu stricto* evaluation of *Museum on Wheels* as an assessment of the project's value, but it does seek to understand what 'proving the worth of the project' and collaboration is for institutions and individuals involved in managing, funding, preparing and organising POLIN's travelling project.

When it comes to understanding the agency of individuals in shaping stories about the past, the widely cited scholars of memory studies have focused on the interaction between/divergence of narratives about the past on the individual level and the broader societal narratives (state institutions, museums, media). For instance, in the 1990s Jan and Aleida Assmann identified three types of memory: personal, communicative and cultural. Communicative memory is not formalized, retained and transmitted by institutions; its endurance depends on the "durability of social bonds and frames" (Assmann 2008,111); it does not go farther than three generations, that is around eighty years back (ibid.). Cultural memory, on the other hand, is institutionalised, external and "stored in symbolic forms that (…) are stable and situation-transcendent" (ibid.,110). The Assmanns' definition of cultural memory takes into account the transmission of meaning and interpretations attributed to past events in societies. The presence of individuals, members of a society, who talk about the past, engage with narratives presented to them in institutionalised contexts, is assumed, yet their agency is not included in the definition of cultural memory. What also remains assumed is that memory narratives on the social level can be divided into communicative or cultural ones. Even if the types proposed by Assmanns are interpreted as 'ideal' in Webberian terms, still the focus in their framework remains on the content of memory narratives and not as much on the actors involved in shaping the narratives and their agency: individuals, institutions, media etc.

The influential term 'postmemory', proposed by Marianne Hirsch is characterized by a similar limitation: it concentrates on how and why memory narratives are transmitted across time, generations, cultures and media; insufficiently addressing the role of individuals' agency in engaging with institutionalised, official narratives about the past. In her books *"*Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*"* (1997) and "The Generation of Postmemory" (2012), Hirsch draws attention to the intergenerational transmission of cultural

memory, especially emphasising the persistence and centrality of memory on traumatic events over generations. In the data gathered for this thesis, most of the narratives about the past that locals present were experienced by their parents or grandparents, and through this there is a familial connection to the narrated past although they did not witness it themselves. Her term 'postmemory' is developed to explore how the generations who do not experience Holocaust directly related to it through cultural trauma[52]. Postmemory is "not a movement, method, or idea" but rather "a *structure* of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall (…) at a generational remove" (Hirsch 2012, 6). Hirsch distinguishes between familial and affiliative postmemory. The former refers to "intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family" (ibid., p.68) and the latter is "the intragenerational horizontal identification that makes that child's position more broadly available to other contemporaries." The concept of postmemory has been widely adopted to study difficult memory and trauma, but there are several problems with Hirsch's approach which need to be acknowledged.

Firstly, Hirsch insufficiently addresses the problematic implications of studying trauma. The possibility of experiencing and relating to trauma by individuals who have not been directly involved in the traumatic event is highly contestable. One has to be very cautious when talking about the articulations of collective memory of events that have been

[52] Several scholars argue for a critical revision of trauma theory. Rothberg (2014) argues that in trauma theory there is a tendency "to polarize and purify the relationship between victims and perpetrators". Furthermore, referring to trauma on the collective or cultural level is a highly contested approach. According to Wulf Kansteiner, "though specific visions of the past might originate in traumatic experiences they do not retain that quality if they become successful collective memories. The concept of trauma, (…), neither captures nor illuminates the forces that contribute to the making and unmaking of collective memories." (2002, 187). Finally, Stef Craps (2013) challenges the central premises of trauma theory as developed by Dominick La Capra, Cathy Caruth, Geoffrey Hartman, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. According to Craps, the trauma theory which stems from the engagement with the Holocaust, offers a Western-world centered account for defining and dealing with trauma. This bias impedes the ethical engagement beyond borders, which trauma theory claims to strive for. He argues for an "inclusive and culturally sensitive" trauma theory (2013, 127), discussing a number of literary texts which discuss trauma and memory in the postcolonial or racial context.

experienced as traumatic for some. The contexts in which such articulation is evoked needs to be considered. As Kansteiner writes, "the delayed onset of public debates about the meaning of negative pasts has more to do with political interests and opportunities than the persistence of trauma or with and 'leakage' in the collective unconscious" (2002, 187). Apart from that, concentrating on the attempts to connect to the traumatic experiences as Hirsch's affiliative postmemory proposes, or to *feel the horror,* in Weissman's words, does not necessarily result in the moral comprehension of the event (2004, 210).[53]

Secondly, Hirsch in her definition does not account for the role of mobility and the importance of individuals with their agency for the movement of narratives, as she focuses solely on the effect of the transmission of the narratives about the past. She describes postmemory as distinct from memory "by generational distance" and from history "by deep personal connection" (1997, 22). She follows Halbwachs in understanding memory as very personal, tied to individual experience and opposed to history. Hirsch analyses cultural products such as photographs and artworks but she does not consider individual responses to these products. Thus, again it is more about the content of the narratives about the past than the involvement of different agents in shaping these collective memory narratives. Generally, Hirsch's concept of postmemory has been applied too often without enough critical distance (Rapson 2015, 19). Yet, her work remains significant for bringing the attention to how memories travel and evolve across time and how individuals, who are situated within familial

[53]Gary Weissman in his book discussed the approach of Weisel (writer, Holocaust survivor), Langer (literary scholar), Spielberg (filmmaker) and Lanzmann (documentary filmmaker) to depicting the Holocaust. Weissman shows that all these men consider "confrontation with the horror" (210) as the best way to understand the event. Yet, he argues that "a feeling of horror neither requires nor guarantees much in the way of historical and moral comprehension of the Holocaust" (ibid.) – can result in moral comprehension, but it does not necessarily need to. According to Weissman, there are two main problems with depicting Holocaust as horror. First, it is a misrepresentation because it is reductive, it "fails to acknowledge tremendous varieties of experience, emotion, and understanding among the victims" (211); and by positioning the gas chambers of Auschwitz as the essence of the Holocaust it creates a hierarchy of suffering, where some experiences are more genuine or worth mentioning than others (ibid.). Second, the stress put on *feeling the horror* "encourages identification with the victim that may impede the consideration of one's potential to occupy the position of perpetrator or bystander" (ibid.).

frames and within wider relationships and cultural narratives, impact these memories. Postmemory additionally highlights the importance of the affective potential that collective memory narratives may evoke, with the caveat that the notion of trauma should be used with caution. Thus, in this thesis the memories that might be traumatic for some are included in the broader and more complex category of 'difficult memory' as it is defined in this chapter, rather than seen a postmemory.

Another widely used and relevant term is Astrid Erll's 'travelling memory' which specifically considers temporal and physical distance across social, cultural and national boundaries. For Erll, memory *is* movement: "traffic between individual and collective levels of remembering, circulation among social, medial, and semantic dimensions." (2011b, 15). She writes that "in the production of cultural memory, people, media, mnemonic forms, contents, and practices are in constant, unceasing motion" (ibid., 9). Erll conceives of media as a key dimension of memory's travels. Specifically, she defines remediation as movement "through time and technologies, the transcription of information from one medium to the next" (ibid., 12).[54]

Erll's work is valuable for recognizing the central importance of movement for collective memory, or cultural memory, as she describes it. Movement, in which she includes travels and communications, is indispensable for memory. Yet, she acknowledges that travelling memory "is a process that scholars can describe; but its outcomes cannot be predicted" and "much of the semantic shape that travelling memory takes on will be the result of the routes it takes in specific contexts and of the uses made by specific people with specific reading of our material" (Erll 2016, 21). Because her definition remains very open, it allows a consideration of a broad range of phenomena, yet this openness makes it too broad

[54]In a similar vein, another publication, edited by Astrid Erll with Ann Rigney (2009), explores "social dynamics of cultural memory" and "the dynamics specific to the ongoing emergence of new media practices" (Erll and Rigney 2009, 5) by examining cases of mediation and remediation of cultural memories by different actors in a range of socio-political contexts.

and too vague to use as as an analytical concept to study the range of relations and interactions which shape collective memory on different levels (vernacular, institutional). Erll suggests that circulation of mnemonic media, for example films, can provoke a change of perspective in viewers or develop empathy, but it is also possible that the memory becomes distorted and misused (ibid.). Her sensitivity to, in her words, "the localizing aspect" (ibid.) pinpoints to the need for exploring the interaction between narratives about the past and the actors, with their agendas, backgrounds and interests, who contribute to shaping collective memory.

Another author, Alison Landsberg (2004), in her book "Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture" proposes the concept of 'prosthetic memory' to examine the transmissions of narratives about the past. She sees prosthetic memory as emerging at the intersection between a personal and historical narrative about the past (Landsberg 2004, 2). Landsberg argues that a commodified mass culture creates possibilities for individuals who do not come from the same cultural background to share some memories (ibid., 9). She defines 'prosthetic memory' as "privately felt public memories that develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past, when new images and ideas come into contact with person's own archive of experience" (ibid., 19). She argues that prosthetic memory has a potential to generate empathy, defined as relating to 'the other' while still recognizing the difference between the other and the self.

Landsberg analyses three main case studies: European immigration to the US in 1910s and 1920s, African American memory, and the Holocaust; focusing mostly on films and museums. Her perspective points at the role of mass media for collective memory narratives and the ways in which these are performed, and her work is mentioned by other authors discussing movement of memory (Erll 2011b, Sturken 2008). However, her concept of *prosthetic memory* and accompanying analysis, as with the previous terms discussed, does

not grant sufficient attention to the diverse ways in which individuals, with their backgrounds and in their local contexts, may interact with the official and institutionalised narratives, such as those of museums. Landsberg's analysis is only based on the content of remediations, cultural productions, there is no examination of the reactions of the audiences to which the films or museum exhibitions are directed. Thus, one can only imagine what the emotional responses are, so Landsberg's claim about a potential of the works examined to generate empathy remains a hypothesis. Furthermore, in the book Landsberg presumes too easily, without explanation, that elements defining individuals' identity, among these: gender, national, cultural, religious belonging and the defining other; can become of secondary importance if prosthetic memory, about for instance the Holocaust, is considered.[55] This thesis brings attention precisely to the role of the diverse factors and relations shaping the interactions of individuals with institutionalised memory narratives, such as those in a museum.

The concepts developed by scholars of memory, as reviewed above, bring attention to the complexity of elements, transfers, factors and actors involved in shaping collective memory on institutional and individual levels. Yet, most of these concepts were created to analyse the movement of different narratives about the past through time across different historical contexts. What I am interested in, on the other hand, is not comparing the content of narratives or identifying elements influenced by the institutional agendas or individual background, but rather bringing to the fore the actors involved in telling stories about the past with their backgrounds, interests, expectations and agendas. Too little work has been done in memory studies to understand how individuals engage with memory narratives presented in the media or institutional narratives (Kansteiner 2017, Kubica and Van de Putte 2019). This thesis aims to contribute to deepening the understanding of the local, everyday interactions

[55]The same problem, with pre-emptive assumptions on unifying power of certain narratives, can be identified in the applications of another widely discussed concept, Levy and Sznaider's 'cosmopolitan memory' (2006).

with institutionalised narratives about difficult pasts, on a case study of a travelling museum in Poland.

The term 'vernacular' is used here to refer to the informal, local, connected everyday as opposed to official and institutional. This thesis explores the vernacular level of memory by analysing the small-town communities visited by *MoW* in order to contribute to a growing body of research which grants attention to this local, communal level of memory. 'Vernacular' has been used by geographers in as similar way, in relation to, for instance, artistic production in a city's neighbourhoods (Bain 2006) or the role of local activists in the preservation of historically significant sites (Muzaini 2013). Hamza Muzaini discusses the vernacular in relation to memory and defines 'vernacular memory making' as

> (...) popular and informal forms of remembering, including private and individual recollections of the past in domestic, communal and everyday settings (Maddrell 2012), to be contrasted with the more officialised and generally encompassing scaffolding of public memory usually spearheaded by the state. (Muzaini 2013, 406).

Similarly, the 'vernacular' has been explored in relation to heritage by Maja Mikula (2015, 757) who shows that "the seemingly 'ephemeral' institutions such as the vernacular museum, dependent so much on performance, oral storytelling, living bodies and intimate interaction (...) play an important role in maintaining and invigorating memory communities."

Muzaini and Mikula highlight that paying attention to the vernacular level can shed light on how collective memory requires contributions of various actors in local communities. This thesis explores the role of the vernacular level further, by studying it in relation to the institutional level of collective memory-making, focusing particularly on the efforts of museums, but also situating both the vernacular and institutional memory narratives within a broader framework of local and national memory politics. As Sabine Marschall noted, that is very little work "that explores (...) the contrast, symbiosis or negation between tangible and intangible or official and vernacular memory practices in the formation of a society's collective memory" (2013, 79). The thesis addresses this gap by focusing on the interaction

between the institutionally-shaped narratives about the past created by a museum from a capital city, and the collective memory narratives on the vernacular level, as narrated by members of local communities interacting with the itinerant project run by this museum.

3.4 Museums as storytellers building communities

Below I discuss how the transformation towards new museology can be interpreted as transformation of museums into storytelling mnemonic institutions which seek to contribute to building communities and engage audiences actively in this process. Because this research examines a museum initiative which deals with difficult memory, institutions focusing, similarly, on troublesome, challenging pasts are particularly analysed. In general, museums, as part of the new museology framework, emphasise and value inclusiveness, openness and participation in their work (Arnold-de-Simine 2013; Macdonald 2011; N. Simon 2010). Yet, at the same time they remain perceived as the vital social institutions responsible for "transforming living memory into institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices which enact and give substance to group identities and foster memory communities" (Arnold-de-Simine 2013, 1–2).

Attempting to embrace the new museology paradigm while aiming to serve particular groups through engaging with narratives, context and cultural codes relevant to these communities, museums have emerged as "more complex sites of representation – multifarious and multifaceted" (Kidd 2014, 6) in striving to combine various interests and aims in their work. New museums seek to become storytellers of grand narratives of inclusion, openness, and tolerance, but at the same time, through transmedia storytelling, they position the individual in the centre, allowing him or her to create a story within the

grand narrative.[56] The story is supposed to be tailored to their individual needs, abilities and level of engagement and interest.

New museums emerge as increasingly confident in asserting their significance and value as agents of social change, particularly by claiming their capacity to nurture respect for differences, stimulate cross-cultural understanding and deal with intolerance and prejudice (Sandell and Nightingale 2012, 2). It is not only that focusing on community, broadly defined, is seen as a way to move away from grand narratives of nation-states, but it is also perceived as a means to include and give voice to the individuals and groups who have been formerly excluded or silenced (Crooke 2011, 410).[57] On a broader level, the articulation of the value of museums in instrumental terms, phrased as social 'impact' "has been marked within larger political discourses that re-frame culture alongside the creative industries (…), not least when it comes to the location of funds to deliver programmes and activities" (Kidd 2014, 7). That museums are becoming increasingly "people-centred" in the recent years is to large extent a consequence of the increased competition on the market for cultural experience (Kidd 2014, 8). Thus, in the commodified cultural sphere, museums regularly have to struggle to combine "commercial, political, ideological and emotional interests and investments" and this often results in compromises and contradictions (Arnold-de-Simine 2013, 9). In the case of museums such as POLIN, the conflicting interests of curators, activists, policy-makers, journalists, administrators, and importantly, funders, must be negotiated.

Certainly not all museums are dependent, at least uniquely, on governmental policies and funding, but also other institutional actors – international bodies, non-governmental organisations or businesses can also contribute with their funding, thus power and interests,

[56]Following the Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory, grand narrative is a term described by Jean-François Lyotard as "ideas, concepts, notions, or beliefs which can function to legitimate certain social actions and practices" (Buchanan 2010).

[57]Yet, as Richard Sandell warns, the reactions of visitors are difficult to predict and messages which seek to evoke empathy and understanding may instead induce equally powerful negative responses (2007, 105).

and in this way are shaping museums' activities and objectives. Arnold de-Simine divides museums into those which seek approval of their exhibition or programme from their customers,[58] mostly private museums; and the state-funded ones which "perform a public role of remembrance in which they are expected to represent a broad social or at least political consensus, producing narratives that form an integral part of national identity politics" (2013, 2). This distinction, however, becomes blurred in the case of museums such as POLIN's Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, which this thesis studies, because it is an instance of a public-private partnership. Seeking for both elements - approval from customers and compliance with narratives which are part of identity politics on the national level, play a role for how the museum defines and constructs itself through narratives and embodied practices.

Another way to understand some of the complex and contradictory social processes museums undergo is provided by Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeld and Pille Runnel (2014). They explain how the interests and activities of museums are situated in a range of relationships formed in the cultural, economic and political fields:

> as a cultural institution, museum roles include preserving, collecting, interpreting and mediating heritage to publics. As a public institution, museums are socialising and democratising agents and thus share the role of educational institutions. The third role comes from the museum as an institution operating within the economic field, where museums need to compete in the open market for clients' leisure and free time (2014, 40)

In building their collections, exhibitions, projects and communication strategies, museums struggle to expand their existing capital(s) and/or build new resources, relationships and networks with the aim of increasing the cultural (and sometimes consequentially financial) value of their activities. In this thesis, the range of relationships with actors with diverse

[58]Both the term 'customer' and 'visitor' are used in academic literature, although the latter is more often applied by social scientists and humanities scholars. I am aware that both terms are limited for scripting the roles of individuals and confining them to singular identities. Yet I prefer to refer to 'visitors' as this notion is more often adopted in the discourse of museum practice.

interests that POLIN is embedded in is outlined in Chapter Two and considered throughout the analysis, in Chapters Five to Eight.

3.5 Collaborative museum-making

Understanding collaboration in connection to memory and museums is key to this thesis. Although my research is situated within the social sciences and humanities, it is worth recognising the connections between my approach and how the term 'collaborative memory' is used elsewhere in research on memory. For instance, for cognitive scientists interested in group memory, 'collaborative memory' is an approach which "provides a critical experimental tool for isolating and identifying the cognitive mechanisms that shape various interactions within a group" (Rajaram and Pereira-Pasarin 2010, 650). Group identity is linked with collective memory and the latter is defined as "the number of overlapping recalled items that the group members share together as a function of previous collaboration" (Rajaram and Pereira-Pasarin 2010, 658).

Taking this to a broader level, contact and interaction with others are thus paramount to collaboration, and it is through collaboration that collective memory appears. In this thesis I am interested in how various types of interactions and the working together of individuals, communities and institutions shape an itinerant museum which evokes difficult memory. This also includes a discussion on how difficult memory is part of collective memory about Jews in Poland, especially in the small-town communities which interact with the museum. Therefore, unpacking the loaded notion of collaboration is central to my framework and analysis. Collaboration, as defined by "the Oxford English Dictionary" has two meanings: (1) "the action of working with someone to produce something", "something produced in collaboration with someone" or (2) "traitorous cooperation with an enemy" (Oxford Dictionary 2018). I elaborate both of these meanings in connection to this thesis in the following paragraphs.

The social role of museums shifted in the last decades to focus on inclusivity, and it is precisely the use of collaborative methods to work with various groups and communities that is seen in the museum world as one of the ways to be more inclusive, democratic and open (Schultz 2011, 1). Much of the research on collaboration in the museum context, however, focuses on creating exhibitions and displays (see for instance: Boast 2011; Harrison 2005; Kahn 2000; Morse, Macpherson, and Robinson 2013; Schultz 2011). These analysed collaborations concentrate, thus, primarily on museums' function as collecting institutions: considering how communities can be included in shaping them, and how these communities can use these collections as resources useful for their own purposes. For example, Lainie Schultz (2011, 1) defines museum collaboration as "the practice of working with communities in the production of knowledge through research and displays" which is meant to "enable communities to utilize collections for their own purposes while producing something of benefit for the museum to share with others".

In this thesis I apply the notion of collaboration more broadly by connecting it to a wider range of museums' activities. I am particularly interested in outreach activities aiming to increase social inclusion and participation from communities with more difficult access to museums' activities. This may include exhibitions, such as in the case I study for this thesis, but collections are not the only element of the outreach initiatives. For *Museum on Wheels*, rural communities around Poland are the target group for the itinerant outreach project, following the idea that if someone cannot come to the museum, the museum comes to them – here literally in a travelling pavilion, bringing accompanying events. Julia Harrison (2005, 210) writes that in the 21st century it is essential "to work with those whose material history museums hold", and while principally she connects it to anthropological museums' work

with 'source communities', such as Aboriginal groups,[59] her point is also relevant for POLIN if one agrees that the history of Jews is part of Polish history. How the process of working together is implemented and what the implied assumptions, risks and potential tensions are, requires a more in-depth explanation, which is what I outline next.

Collaborating "means working together, but it does not imply that the process is efficient nor that the product is effective or accurate" (Dixon 2013). A collaborative process is a compromise (Kahn 2000, 71), and there is no "formulaic model to be followed to ensure that most workable and empowering relationships unfold" (Harrison 2005, 210). Nina Simon (2010, 188) suggests that how communities are involved depends on the museum itself, and there are several models which can be adopted. She proposes four models for public participation in the work of cultural institutions: contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted projects. I do not treat Simon's description as a strict definition of the collaborative model because I find it more useful for this thesis to explore issues of collaboration in the museum context more generally, as 'working together'. However, her approach valuably points out some of the possibilities for how diverse the projects which seek to include audiences can be. On the basis of Simon's descriptions and the adaptation of her models by Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Pille Runnel (2014, 38), I see *Museum on Wheels* as a project that, in its aims and practice, adopts elements of two models: contributory and collaborative. The Museum controls the process, and some power is given to a small group, local activists – following the assumptions of the collaborative model –, but the project is targeted to a broader audience who may contribute through leaving feedback or comments – following the contributory model. Yet, the contribution of local activists is framed within the project's aims and constrained by the structure set by the museum, as I show in Chapter Five.

[59]Julia Harrison's article is a response to a book edited by Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers *Museums and Source Communities*. A Routledge Reader (2003).

The participation and engagement of individuals is, in one way or the other, fundamental to collaborative projects. Importantly, however, Nuala Morse et al. (2013, 103) show that attempts to 'produce' engagement may "rest on a number of unexamined assumptions, around who might participate and why". These assumptions might be tied to institutional power and imbalances in the relationship between the institution and the communities which are to be included. Robin Boast (2011, 58) argues for instance that "no matter how much museum studies have argued for a pluralistic approach to interpretation and presentation, the intellectual control has largely remained in the hands of the museum". In the thesis I reflect on this imbalance and questions around control by bringing attention to the vernacular level of interpretations of museum's stories, instead of remaining focused on what the museum presents.

Here it is also crucial to consider how the collaborative process relates to stories that are promoted by the travelling museum, as well as those evoked by visitors. Visitors, as I explained already, productively receive what is presented to them in the pavilion through the display, educators' stories, and during accompanying events. One of the goals of the *MoW* project was to facilitate and support a process of including memory about Jews to local narratives about the past, and many people who came into the pavilion reacted enthusiastically to the idea and wanted to find out more about Jews in local history and Jewish history and culture more broadly.

On the other hand, collaboration during the visits of *MoW* also meant working against the museum in more or less conspicuous ways - and collective memory was fundamental in this process. Many locals were 'collaborative' with one another: following unspoken agreements about what should and what should not be said to POLIN's staff and to me as a researcher, who were all perceived as guests in the local community. Elements of collective memory, including stories or material remnants, that might or were perceived to shed

negative light on the local or national community were often, but not always, protected and replaced by accounts of Righteous Defence. These 'negative stories' included issues such as hostility or violence towards Jews or other minority groups during the Holocaust or earlier, the denunciation of Jews, or collaboration with the Nazi occupiers during WW2. I elaborate on this in Chapters Seven and Eight.

In connection to this, the second meaning of the term 'collaboration' needs to be addressed in this section. Some academics writing about collaboration in the museum context note the complexity of the notion which in many European languages has a connotation to WW2 and Nazis as 'traitorous cooperation with the enemy' (Harrison 2005, 196). This meaning is very significant in relation to the narratives shaping collective memory about Jews in Poland as I described them in Chapter Two. In Polish, the word *kolaboracja*, which is the literal translation of 'collaboration', is most often used in precisely that meaning, as 'traitorous cooperation with enemy', referring to people in occupied Poland who cooperated with Nazis during WW2. To express what is meant by the first definition of 'collaboration', in Polish one would rather use *współpraca* which translates as 'working together'.

In a long-read article, David G. Roskies (2018) comments on the January 2018 legislation by tracing the archetype of Judas as the first collaborator,[60] highlighting selected works of Polish literature about the Holocaust in the context of the political developments in Poland after 2015. Roskies explains how these two meanings are connected, referring to the Vichy government in France which collaborated with the Nazis: "before Marshal Pétain gave the term 'collaboration' a bad name, its primary meaning was 'working together.'" (2018). Indeed, 'collaboration' comes from 19th century Latin *collaborare*: working together (Oxford Dictionary 2018), but in the 21st century Europe, and especially in this thesis, the intricacy of

[60]This legislation penalizes placing any responsibility on Poland or Polish people for the atrocities committed by Nazis. I discuss it further in Chapter Eight.

the term and its connotations with the Holocaust cannot be ignored. What is said and unsaid about collaboration in occupied Poland is one of the elements of the broader picture composed of narratives about the Holocaust and Jews evoked in the public sphere in Poland, as it was explained in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER FOUR Methodology for researching an itinerant museum

This thesis is a qualitative study inspired by multi-sited ethnography based on a variety of sources gathered mostly in the field, including webpages, articles published in on-line and printed media, brochures, leaflets, interviews conducted face-to-face or via Skype, notes from participant observation and reflections on my own experience during *MoW*'s travels around Poland. In this chapter I provide an overview of these methods and, following from the Preface, I further reflect on my positionality in relation to this research; for in the social constructivist epistemology which I adopt, the experiences of the researcher are tightly linked with the knowledge generated.

In this thesis I use qualitative methods because they are most suitable for exploring "processes, meaning patterns and structural features" of social realities (Flick, von Kardoff, and Steinke 2008, 19). I was interested in gathering various kinds of data, but much of it from the field, and ethnography, as it "remains firmly rooted in the first-hand exploration of research settings" (Atkinson et al. 2010, 5), served as an inspiration for my approach. As I explain in this chapter, in ethnographic or ethnography-inspired studies, including mine, observation and participation are paramount but, to supplement the analysis of the fieldwork material, interviews and examination of textual material in various forms are drawn on as well (Atkinson et al. 2010, 4–5). My approach is mostly inductive and emic which requires referring to what emerges in the field and making claims and identifying patterns after examining the data (Tracy 2012, 22). However, I also used the etic and deductive approach, as referred to by Sarah Tracy (2012, 22): I turned to existing theoretical models after investigating my data and adapted these theories to help me interpret my findings.

My study is framed by social constructivist or constructionist ontology and epistemology.[61] My ontology, understood as "the worldviews and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge" (Schwandt 2007, 190 in: Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011, 102) is relativist in that it assumes that there is no objective reality, but "reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through meanings and understandings developed socially and experimentally" (Guba and Lincoln 1994 in: Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011, 103). It is tied to an epistemological stance which is subjectivist and transactional (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011, 100). This means that epistemology, which can be seen as "the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched" (Creswell 1998, 75) in this case connects the lived experiences of the researcher with the knowledge generated: "the investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world" (Guba and Lincoln 1994 in: Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011, 104).

4.2 Multi-sited ethnography

In gathering the data, I was inspired by multi-sited ethnography: I do not focus on "single locality as the boundary and privileged site for the study of cultural production" (Berg 2008), as traditional ethnography would do, but my investigation deals with "a multiplicity of sites, flows and circulations" (Berg 2008). I do not concentrate on one group of local subjects but rather investigate a museum project which moves, with its employees, pavilion and educational offer, between locations and engages locals in multiple locations. At the centre of designing multi-sited ethnography, including my study, are the "strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships" (Marcus 1995, 97). Yet, as

[61]I do not distinguish between constructivism and constructionism, because these two are often use interchangeably under a generic term 'constructivism' (T. Andrews 2012). Yet, in some academic literature they are characterized as different, because "Constructivism proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes while social constructionism has a social rather than an individual focus (Young & Colin, 2004)" (ibid.).

Ulla D. Berg (2008) notes, there is a practical challenge that comes with multi-sited ethnography: because of the importance of movement, "the researcher has less time at each individual site and with each localized population, thus having fewer opportunities to 'get to know' people and their social worlds, and to establish more profound social relationships in ways that allow us to access more existential fields of existence".

For my study, following the movement and observing the museum employees in various places constituted an important element of the fieldwork. Also, my aim was to examine the range of interactions of locals with *MoW* in multiple sites, so it was most valuable for me to follow the museum on its tour. Yet, that I visited the places only once is a limitation of my study, as remaining in the towns visited for longer, coming earlier or re-visiting them after the tour and talking to the inhabitants then could have offered me a better understanding of the local context. Below, I explain why I chose particular methods during fieldwork and for data analysis. In my approach, I incorporated three methodological requirements of ethnographic research as defined by Isabelle Baszanger and Nicolas Dodier: "the need for an empirical approach; the need to remain open to features that cannot be codified at the time of the study; a concern for grounding the phenomena observed in the field" (2004, 10).

The first requirement signifies that to understand studied phenomena an empirical observation is required. I observed the travelling museum in various capacities, as the Preface explains. In the autumn of 2014, I worked for POLIN in three towns in North-East Poland as one of the two *Museum on Wheels'* educators. Although this lasted less than two weeks, it gave me an insight into the range of locals' reactions, the diversity of local contexts, and allowed me to observe the structure of this collaborative project. In 2015, I joined *MoW* for almost three months on tour in Western, Southern and Central Poland as a researcher employed by POLIN to collect data through interviews and surveys, prepare

comprehensive reports from each town and one final one about the whole tour, and conduct oral history interviews for the museum's virtual archive. This placed me in a position that was defined by POLIN Museum: the staff introduced me to the local activists and visitors as the researcher, and the underlying assumptions were that my main role was to observe, invite people for an interview or to fill in a survey. I explicitly stated in all conversations I had that I was also a researcher connected to King's College London and that the data I gathered would be used in my doctoral thesis. By the locals I was welcomed and treated as part of POLIN team: I would be included in guided walks or trips that were sometimes offered and invited for meals or coffee breaks.

For these three months, the second requirement that Baszanger and Dodier describe was crucial for me. I needed to stay open-minded in order to discover the components constituting the representations of the world and the tools "that people mobilize in their interactions with others and, more generally, with the world" (Baszanger and Dodier 2004, 11). I wanted to observe how *MoW* worked as a collaboration between the local level and the institution - POLIN Museum; I was interested in locals' reactions to the project, the diverse activities organised as part of the museum's visit in a town and how these related to local contexts; and in the study of *MoW* I intended to follow the general approach of grounded theory (Charmaz 2011; Glaser and Strauss 2004; Strauss and Corbin 1994). Epistemologically, this inductive study is therefore an in-situ investigation, defined by openness to new data, as opposed to a priori deductive studies where particular activities are studied following rigorous schedules and according to pre-defined items and rules (Baszanger and Dodier 2004, 11). In my fieldnotes and then in the analysis of the ethnographic material I sought to connect what I observed with "specific features of the backdrop against which these facts occur, which are linked to historical and cultural

contingencies" (ibid., 12), therefore following the third requirement that Baszanger and Dodier define.

In my final period of fieldwork conducted during the museum's tour, for two weeks in 2016, I was no longer a member of POLIN team. I joined as a King's College London researcher to gather material about the itinerant museum; however, I believe that my affiliation with the project the previous year helped me to define my position and verify credibility for locals who engaged with the museum. In 2016, since I had already begun the analysis of the 2015 fieldwork data, I found it more challenging to remain open to new data and opportunities for gathering it. Having had the long-term fieldwork experience already, I had some structures and pre-defined rules which gradually emerged in my approach in the previous year; thus, I had to actively push myself beyond these in order to discover new data. For instance, in 2016 I had more time to walk around and learn about places in which the museum was - because I did not have to spend time fulfilling the responsibilities which were part of my contract with POLIN in 2015, I had more time for interactions with local inhabitants.

Here it is also important to mention how I recorded my observations from the field. As Robert E. Emerson et. al. (2010, 352) note: participant observations include not only getting access to and engaging oneself in new social realms but also "[produce] written accounts and descriptions that bring versions of these worlds to others". While doing fieldwork, I always carried a small notebook with me in which I jotted down keywords or phrases to record what was occurring, how people reacted and how I felt. For part of the time, especially in 2015, I did this openly and it seemed to be accepted by POLIN's staff, visitors, and others engaging with *MoW*. Perhaps this acceptance was linked to the assumption that as a researcher I was expected to take a lot of notes, and, in particular that I was commissioned by POLIN Museum to do this job. When discussing the complexities of

taking notes during fieldwork, Robert Emerson et. al. highlight the need for the researcher to be sensitive when taking notes because it could be taken as a violation of trust (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2010, 357). During my own fieldwork, I knew it was important to be sensitive and avoid taking notes sometimes, for instance because it did not seem appropriate in a given situation. I was most careful, and usually would not openly take notes when I was actively participating in an event or interaction in the *MoW* pavilion or elsewhere in the space of the town. Later, but ideally on the same day or at least while in the same town still, I developed the jotted notes into longer sentences, recorded conversations which I thought were important, wrote down details of encounters or situations and noted my own responses, thoughts and feelings, particularly if there was something that I felt strongly about.

To combine the series of data collected during fieldwork into a single whole, I used a method identified by Baszanger and Dodier as 'combinative ethnography'. This includes gathering data in the field in different ways to produce "an inventory of possible situations" (Baszanger and Dodier 2004, 19). In my case, these situations included, for example: interactions between visitors, as well as between visitors and POLIN's staff, inside and outside of the *MoW*'s pavilion, interactions between POLIN's staff, interview situations, local events happening elsewhere in the space of the town, and to some extent, everyday life during the period of *MoW*'s stay in the town. The aim of combinative ethnography is to generalize from the study: in the case of this thesis, this signifies using *MoW* as a case study to identify mechanisms which shape the process of evoking difficult memory collaboratively in a museum outreach project. In combinative ethnography, the context of what is observed is treated as "a disparate collection of resources between which individuals have to navigate" (Baszanger and Dodier 2004, 18). The assumption of integrative approach that collective consciousness is shared, is replaced here with the idea that individuals, and their actions, "are located at the intersection of a non-harmonized plurality of references (...)" (ibid., 19).

Individuals act in the framework of situation-related and complex normative references (ibid.). In the thesis, I study the local, national and institutional contexts in which locals are embedded using the diverse material I gathered: interviews, participant observations, texts, visual material. In connection to this, the value of combinative ethnography is that it allows the recognition of "what we all mobilize in the course of action, or what we might be brought to mobilize if confronted with a given set of arrangements or a given action-related position." (Baszanger and Dodier 2004, 27). It follows symbolic interactionism in that it sees individuals' reactions as dependent on situational contexts and interpretations. That is "we do not react to 'facts' as they 'really are' but to our consciousness of those facts, and that consciousness is necessarily interpretative and experiential" (Rock 2010, 27). This applies to both myself as a researcher and my research subjects, and I reflect further on how individuals engage with the world in an interactionist framework in Chapter Seven, where I analyse locals' responses to *MoW*.

4.3 Interviews

Apart from participant and non-participant observation, results of which I recorded by hand in one of my fieldwork notebooks, gathering data through semi-standardised interviews was a key element of my methodology. I conducted more than 100 interviews which lasted between a few minutes and an hour between 2015 and 2017.[62] Although not all of them are quoted and analysed in the thesis, each of these interviews still informed my research. Most of the interviews that were transcribed, analysed in-depth and quoted in this thesis, come from the six towns which I decided to focus on in this research.[63] The rationale behind the

[62]With most informants I conducted one interview only, and the exception were POLIN's staff: coordinators and educators, and four of the local activists from the 2015 tour. These activists responded to my follow-up questions via Skype or email around two years after *MoW* visited their towns. As for the coordinators, I interviewed them repeatedly to learn about the evolution of the project, and the educators were interviewed more than once if they worked in more than one town where I conducted fieldwork: I talked to them after a visit in each town separately.

[63]Apart from some of the interviews conducted with POLIN's staff, which were conducted in Warsaw or elsewhere while *MoW* was on tour and one interview conducted with a local activist in Białowieża in 2016.

selection of the towns, as well as general characteristics of the ones that were chosen, is explained in Appendix Four. Upon the approval of the interviewees, the interviews were audio-recorded on an audio-recording device and stored on encrypted external hard drives. In-depth interviewing is connected to a number of ethical concerns (see Allmark et. al. 2009), and I addressed a number of those in my applications for the approval of the Research Ethics Committee at King's College London, which I was granted to conduct this research. The ethical issues which were most relevant to this thesis included: informed consent, confidentiality and dual role of the researcher.

To ensure that the interviewees understood the purpose of the research and how their story and data would be used, all participants received information sheet as well as relevant consent forms to sign before agreeing to participate. I explained that this research has been approved by the Ethics Committee at King's College London, informed that it is their decision whether they agree to participate or not and that if they do participate they can withdraw during the interview, and not respond to questions they do not feel comfortable responding to. I also told them that if after the interview they change their mind they had a few months to still withdraw and in such case their data and recording would be destroyed. All this information was given to participants on paper and signed copies of the consent forms were stored by me in a relevant confidential folder, and handed to the participants to take home. Some locals whom I approached inviting for the interview declined for various reasons before reading the consent form or as I was informing them about the research and their potential participation. No interviewee, however, had withdrawn during or after the interview.

Białowieża is not described as one of the towns studied in-depth in the appendix because the account of the local acitivist is analysed in Chapter Six on the structure of *MoW* and in relation to this the characteristics of the local context are not central.

As for confidentiality, the participant, depending on the category they belonged to (categories are explained below), was informed that responses would be anonymised (for visitors and teachers) or that anonymity could not be guaranteed because of the nature of the data (for POLIN's staff and local activists). The data of the participants, as well as the recordings, were handled with care ensuring that the participants remain anonymous, whenever this was possible. I always did my best to conduct the interview in a location in which the participant felt comfortable talking. Some of the interviews were recorded in a quieter corner of the *MoW* pavilion, if the participants agreed to this, but most were conducted outside if it was warm enough on a bench, chairs, or in a local school, cultural centre, library or a café.

As I explained in the Preface, in 2015 but also in 2016 to some extent, while travelling with the museum my role was defined in relation to not only the PhD research but also the research project which I was conducting for POLIN Museum in 2015. I gathered data to prepare reports for POLIN Museum and to use it in my own research as explained above. Yet, for some interviewees I was primarily a member of *MoW* team so the way they treated me was influenced by, for example, whether they liked or disliked other team members or local coordinators of the project. Two examples of encounters in which the interviewees treated me above all as a member of *MoW* team are analysed in Chapter Eight.

Looking back at the fieldwork I conducted, I recognise that the most suitable approach for my study was semi-structured (or semi-standardised) interviews. In semi-standardised interviews, researchers follow an interview guide which gives them relative freedom in the formulation of questions as well as choosing their order and follow-ups (Hopf 2008, 282). I followed the semi-structured approach for most of the fieldwork, but with some interviewees the interview was more structured than with others, because for various reasons I did not feel ready to give myself much freedom in shaping the interview by formulating

questions in a different way or changing the interview structure. From the perspective of the data analysis I know now that the interviews which contained stories or reactions which were most valuable for my analysis were those where I followed a semi-standardised framework, rather than a set structure. On the other hand, the more structured ones were useful for understanding the data in a more systematic manner: identifying patterns, similarities and differences in responses was easier.

The individuals I interviewed were always adults, of ages between 18 and 80+. I divided the interviewees into five age groups: 18-30, 31-45, 46-64, 65-80 and 80+; and into four general categories: POLIN's staff (educators, full-time coordinators, other staff), local activists (individuals who coordinated *MoW*'s stay in collaboration with POLIN, supporting staff from local institutions or organisations, invited lecturers or workshop convenors or facilitators or other activities), teachers or group leaders (accompanying school groups or other types of organised groups, usually formed of children or young people, when visiting *MoW* or participating in workshops), individual visitors (adults who visited the *MoW* pavilion or participated in activities run as part of the museum's visit). For a list of interviewees, whose accounts were analysed, divided into categories and age groups, see Appendix Two. I had an interview guide for each of the four categories of interviewees and adopted the questions according to the particular interview situation, although, as already explained, some interviews were more structured while others rather semi-standardized. The interview guides are attached in Appendix One.

During my fieldwork periods I interviewed all of POLIN's staff and most local activists who worked with *MoW* when I was present during the tour, but for teachers and individual visitors I selected samples of a few interviewees in each town. I had up to 10 or 12 interviews from each town, usually between 60 and 70 percent of them conducted with visitors and teachers or group leaders. I selected samples from the visitors and participants

because of the limited time and capacities I had for conducting and analysing the interviews, but also because from the outset I envisioned this research to be a qualitative study where I could focus more in-depth on a smaller amount of data, rather than analyse large data sets.

Among the limitations of this approach is certainly my bias in recruiting the interviewees. First of all, I approached mostly people who had spent some time (at least five to ten minutes) familiarising themselves with the content of the itinerant museum, those who were present for at least part of an activity organised locally and thus my interviewees had some interest in interacting with the travelling museum. I decided not to interview locals who would not attend any events or visit the pavilion and therefore my sampling frame was limited; for instance, among the people I interviewed, the responses to *MoW*'s presence were rarely openly negative. At the same time, focusing on those who interacted with the itinerant project allowed me to explore the ephemeral intervention of the museum in the small towns more closely: I could investigate, for instance, how locals interacted with particular stories that the exhibition in the pavilion featured. My aim was to select a similar number of male and female interviewees, but this was rarely possible because there were by far more females in most of the categories, especially the first two I identified (POLIN's staff and local activists).[64] I also sought to interview people in all age groups, but when it comes to visitors least represented were the younger ones (18-30 and 31-45) and consequentially most of my interviewees were older than 31.

4.4 Other fieldwork material

Apart from the interviews, which I conducted in the field for the most part[65], I also collected other materials during fieldwork. While travelling with the museum I often took pictures of

[64]Generally, it was a trend that more women work in the education department of POLIN Museum and that many of the local activists who engaged with *MoW* were women. I did not, unfortunately, ask them (or the men who were involved) to identify the reasons of such imbalance.

[65]Except for a few interviews with POLIN's staff which were recorded in Warsaw in September 2015 and January and March 2017, and a few follow-up interviews with local activists via Skype recorded in 2017.

where the pavilion was placed and of the town, and these helped me remember visually the few days spent in a given town. I also collected copies of any brochures, leaflets, programmes or postcards that were prepared for the local audience in respective towns and indicated what the stay of *MoW* included, and usually gave some information about the local Jewish heritage. In some towns I managed to get a copy of a promotional poster of *MoW* or some local newspaper which wrote about the project and local events. By the end of the fieldwork I gathered more than 10 books about local past or oral history, which were often given to me as presents by someone I interviewed, for instance a local activist. I supplemented all this material with online searches for information about *MoW* on POLIN's webpage (in English and Polish), EEA and Norway Grants site, other English-language websites where *MoW* was mentioned, but also in Polish on local websites, local or regional newspapers or magazines, and on Facebook, where I read through the page on *MoW* set up by POLIN's staff.

Additionally, I participated in two training sessions for local activists who worked with POLIN to bring the museum to their town, in 2015 and 2017. During these I introduced myself as a research student and talked briefly about my experience as an educator in 2014 and my role as a researcher in 2015. Being part of these sessions gave me a chance, among other things, to observe some of the changes to how *MoW* was run by POLIN Museum and how the collaboration structures were evolving. POLIN's staff were very helpful in sharing with me the materials they used during training, and this allowed me to study these in more depth later on. In April 2016 I presented the 2015 report at a conference for local activists held at POLIN to conclude the 2014 and 2015 tour. During that conference, apart from recording reactions of the audience to my own talk, I could participate in all the other events planned for the day, and this gave me unique insight into how *MoW* fitted into POLIN's work more broadly.

Finally, in 2015, preparing reports from towns I visited and writing the final report about the whole tour that year, was a very valuable opportunity for learning about the evaluation criteria of POLIN Museum and of *MoW*'s funder – Norway Grants and EEA Grants. Through the Ministry of Culture,[66] I also got access to parts of the application that POLIN Museum submitted to get funding for the Jewish Heritage Project, and thanks to a few local activists working with POLIN, I could also read applications submitted to the museum to host *MoW* in their town, which they sent to me via e-mail. Getting access to such a broad range of materials gave me an insight into aspects of the *MoW* project such as planning, designing its aims and structure, promotion, training of local activists, through running the tours, recording local responses, evaluating the project and incorporating *MoW* into POLIN's broader narrative and the local stories about interventions related to Jewish heritage. This enabled me to conduct this research as 'combinative ethnography'.

4.5 Analysis: grounded theory approach

To analyse data, I broadly followed the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz 2011; Glaser and Strauss 2004; Strauss and Corbin 1994) which is "a general method of comparative analysis" (Glaser and Strauss 2004, 1). Grounded theory develops during the research process "through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (Strauss and Corbin 1994, 273). As mentioned earlier, my approach is specifically informed by the social constructivist grounded theory which "places priority on the phenomena of study and sees both data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants and other sources of data" (Charmaz 2006, 130) It requires the researchers to follow four principles:

> Treat the research process itself as a social construction; Scrutinize research decisions and directions; Improvise methodological and analytic strategies throughout the research process; Collect sufficient data to discern and document how research participants construct their lives and worlds. (Charmaz 2008, 403).

[66]The Ministry administrates the funding.

I address the first point by adopting a subjectivist and transactional epistemology, which includes examining "the depictions of social constructions in the studied world" (Charmaz 2008, 397). The social constructions I focus on in this thesis are: 'collective memory' and 'collaboration', as defined in the Literature Review. The vocabulary I use in conjunction with these notions, such as 'evoking memory', 'collaborative museum-making', 'engaging or interacting with the museum/memory/narratives etc', reflect the role I assign to humans as social agents who act in cultural, economic, political and situation contexts. Also, when I write that a museum is 'engaging with' something I imply that there is human agency behind it, the staff, curators, funders who shape the museum's policies, agendas and everyday work.

In the following paragraphs I explain how I incorporate the second and third elements. However, before I do that a brief clarification on how I address the final point is necessary. Charmaz (2008, 403) explains that "in order to understand how research participants construct their world, researchers need to know that world from their participants' standpoints" and collecting sufficient data which is thorough and rich "facilitates seeking and seeing tacit meanings and actions and constructing useful grounded theories". As explained above, I did not conduct long-term ethnography but was inspired in my approach by multi-sited ethnography. This meant that I moved between places following the itinerant museum and spent only three to four days in most towns, and therefore it was not possible to learn about the local context and my interviewees in great detail. However, as my study is focused on the itinerant museum and the interactions it evoked, I adapted my approach to fieldwork to how the travelling project is structured.

I began the fieldwork with some general questions and assumptions, but my hypotheses, further questions and broader theoretical findings emerged in the process of analysis where I developed codes, compared it with data, created more general categories, and analysed the data accordingly (Charmaz 2011). 'Codes' are named concepts that relate

directly to the data; they have a provisional character and "in the course of the analysis they become more differentiated, numerous and abstract" thus becoming what is known as 'categories' (Bohm 2008, 357). Grounded theory as a method is interactive and built on iteration and comparisons (Charmaz 2011, 361). My interaction with the data consisted of going back and forth between the data and the analysis, trying out certain theories to frame the study; then deciding to change direction, as engaging in abductive reasoning led to finding new and potential ideas for interpretation in the data; I developed an alternative coding system, and then again compared it with more data and came up with more abstract categories.

I did not analyse all the data gathered from all the 19 towns I visited in 2015 and 2016 in the same depth. For the more in-depth analysis I focused on data gathered in five towns in 2015: Koźminek, Łazy, Namysłów, Pińczów and Żarki; and one in 2016: Przeworsk. But while making comparisons and searching for general patterns and theory, I drew on materials collected elsewhere as well. The rationale behind choosing these particular six towns is explained in Appendix Four. To begin coding the data, I first transcribed a few of the interviews, developed initial codes, and, using NVivo software, coded these interviews. At this point the interviews were transcribed in Polish and not translated into English, although codes were in English. The rest of the textual and visual material I coded using mind maps drawn by hand. To revise the codes and arrive at a more general level of analysis I started writing drafts of chapters which explored hypotheses about the museum project, reactions to it, and local contexts and memory that the presence of *MoW* invoked. The act of translation from Polish to English, as most of my material is in Polish, was a significant element in these initial stages of analysis. I only translated selected excerpts of interviews and other materials into English - those that I used in the writing.

My position as a mediator between the languages, translating from my first language (Polish) into my second one (English) has implications for the data I present and analyse in the thesis. I follow the epistemological position of social constructivism which is an approach to knowledge and its production that recognises my location within the social world as an influence on how I see the world (Temple and Young 2004, 164). Therefore, as a translator, I am a part of the process in which knowledge is produced; "there is no neutral position from which to translate and the power relationships within research need to be acknowledged" (Temple and Young 2004, 164). A single 'correct' translation of a text does not exist (Temple and Young 2004, 165). My translation was an act of interpretation filtered through my own knowledge, understanding of concepts, and experiences. The interviewees I quote, or texts I translate from Polish into English in the thesis, incorporate an additional level of analysis: my agency is implied in the act of translation.

The initial stage of writing draft analyses required going back to the data and codes as well as consulting and gathering new data. In the process, I decided to change some of the codes, and use these to code more data. Having done this I arrived at more general categories which I situated in the framework of existing literature on museums' outreach, collective memory and memory about Jews in Poland, and these developed into the core elements of my argument. These core elements are new museology and collaboration in the museum context, but also more broadly in connection to memory, productive reception of museum projects, and the prevalence of Jewish absence in the collective memory on the vernacular level in Poland. The Literature Review Chapter has been revised following this process of analysis to make sure that the secondary literature discussed there provides the framework for the argument developed in this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE Local activists: connecting the museum's agenda with the local communities

This chapter explores POLIN's agenda in the framework of new museology, where much importance is given to engaging communities in museums' work (Hooper-Greenhill 1994) and situating museums as agents of social inclusion (Sandell 1998). I concentrate on the relationship between POLIN and rural communities because, for POLIN, *MoW* was a pivotal project for providing a link between the museum's exhibition and work in Warsaw (which uses source material related to small towns and villages) and the towns and villages from which this material comes. As Dariusz Stola said:

> (…) [*Museum on Wheels*] articulates this concept of 'outreach' best. That one of precisely reaching outside. And this museum, and its whole idea, is a big-city invention. It was created by intellectuals from Warsaw. Well Warsaw, Tel Aviv, New York. It was not created in the province. Although the world which it described, to a large extent, until the second half of the 19th century, was a very provincial world. So this was somehow... as if in the construction of this museum there is a clash, and that made me glad: oh! this is even where it should be shown. Precisely in these Janów Podlaskis, these Radzymins and places alike. And the practice showed that it is not only a good idea, that it is not only good in the sense that it locates the storytelling in the place where the story happened, but it also does so in a way that attracts local listeners. Because we may as well make an exhibition which is attended by five people, right. (Stola, Warsaw 31.01.2017)

In this excerpt, POLIN Museum's Director highlights some of the key tensions and themes that are discussed in this chapter. Then, as Stola implies at the end of his statement, the travelling museum was perceived by POLIN as a successful project which attracted high numbers of visitors, and I explore the notion of 'success' in the context of an outreach project in this chapter as well.

Specifically, this chapter sheds light on the tensions between the agenda and approach of *MoW* and the modes in which the project's partners, local activists, got involved in this travelling project. In the evaluation of *MoW* by POLIN, 'success' is defined primarily quantitatively, and I show how this emphasis on quantitative measures remained in tension with the emphasis on openness and responsiveness to the needs of engaged communities. As

serving communities and encouraging 'participation' is one of the key values in new museology (Crooke 2011; N. Simon 2010), the chapter suggests that a more complex understanding of the project can be provided by paying attention to how local activists contributed to shaping *MoW*, with their motivations and expectations. Based on reports, applications and interviews with decision-makers involved in creating the itinerant project, I discuss how *MoW* was shaped by various actors, interests and agendas, and how this was different on the institutional level of POLIN and on the local level of towns visited. First, I examine how *MoW* is portrayed in certain on-line materials and brochures: as a successful project which encouraged locals' engagement. Second, I focus on the element of this storytelling describing a successful project: the value of *MoW* and the importance that is attached to numbers (of visitors, towns visited, mentions in the media etc.) in POLIN's discourse about the itinerant museum.

All this leads me to the most substantial and central part of this chapter, where I explore the concepts of 'participation' and 'coordination' in *MoW's* agenda. I analyse the role of local activists, who became short-term local project coordinators, and show how their local aims, needs and expectations were (or were not) incorporated into the collaborative processes shaping *MoW*. In relation to the broader argument of this thesis, this chapter follows the analysis of the previous one by demonstrating how the tensions between the museum's aims, agenda and stories and locals' needs, expectations and preoccupation with Jewish absence shaped the collaborative making of *MoW*. In this chapter I focus on the role of the local activists and suggest that POLIN, by prioritising attracting high numbers of local participants to events and visitors to the pavilion, insufficiently engaged with the long-term needs and difficult memory related to the preoccupation with Jewish absence in visited towns. It is not to say that these were not addressed, but that the modes in which they could be included were

constrained by the disproportionate levels of responsibility assigned during the collaborative making of *MoW* to the local activists and POLIN's staff.

5.2 Presenting *MoW* as an attractive outreach project

Museum on Wheels was part of a larger project run by POLIN Museum, called the Jewish Cultural Heritage (JCH), as explained in Chapter Two. The overall goals of the JCH project are explained as follows on the English version of the project's page:

> to recover and transmit the legacy of Polish Jews through education, based on the belief that exposure to the rich and dramatic history of Polish Jews provides more than knowledge of history: it inculcates respect for people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, strengthens the resolve to fight xenophobia, and prepares young people for life in today's diverse society. ("Jewish Cultural Heritage Project | POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews" 2017)

JCH project is based on the presumption that knowledge about the ethnic diversity in the past past contributes to creating a more inclusive and open society in the present and for the future. Such an understanding of the museum's mission of bringing together the past, the present and the future, resonates with the discourses of new museology (see for instance: Hein 2011; Sandell 2007). As explained in Chapter Three, institutions which embrace the tenets of new museology assert their importance and value as agents of social change (Sandell and Nightingale 2012, 2). The JCH project is promoted as a successful initiative that stimulated openness and understanding of diversity in the society.[67]

The museum describes JCH activities as successful on multiple levels. The information about the JCH project on POLIN's website, available in Polish and English, enunciates, over the course of three paragraphs, the various groups that were reached, international partners that were involved and goals that the project had (quoted above). The remaining two paragraphs on the website list the awards that POLIN Museum won in 2016

[67]Yet, whether educating about the 'legacy of Polish Jews' generates respect and openness to diversity is another, complicated question. The creators of the multiple programs included in the JCH project seemed to be aware of the complexity of the issue: for instance, they acknowledged that there are diverse needs and modes of interaction which people might choose in engaging with POLIN's work by including a variety of activities in the JCH project.

and 2017 and explain how "impact studies confirm the high quality of the activities carried out as part of the programme" (POLIN 2017). The description is written in a self-congratulatory tone and a language that one would use in reports for funders on a successfully completed activity: it appeals rather to POLIN's donors than the individuals who participated in or contributed to the project. Indeed, perhaps this part of the website is not targeted at people who were involved in the JCH's many activities. Yet, the discourse of successful performance supplemented with quantitative data is also used in other summaries of JCH's programs. As my thesis focuses on *MoW,* I below offer some examples referring to this particular initiative.

Figure 3: Headline photo of the *Museum on Wheels* website until 2018. Photo taken by Alicja Szulc for the Museum on the History of Polish Jews POLIN. Used with the permission of the museum.

The webpage of *Museum on Wheels* (POLIN 2018a), which is a sub-page of the 'Education' section of POLIN Museum website, was until early 2018 headed by a lively photo taken by POLIN's photographer of a group of young people (Figure 3). The group seems to be participating in a game, trying to throw some object into a small pot: a girl in the middle is throwing and a few others are holding her, so that she does not touch the ground, while the rest are gathered around enthusiastically supporting. The picture brings out connotations with Catholic iconography: everyone is gathered around a central item, here a cup, which is catching a ray of light from the sky, symbolizing connection with divinity. Thus, Jewish culture is framed through Catholic aesthetics perhaps because the website administrators expected the target audience to be connected to Catholicism or at least to be familiar with Catholic iconography.

This was not mentioned in the image description, but the photo was taken in Łazy, during the city game. As I analyse it in Chapter Six, in this city game a number of stereotypical depictions of Jews were used, without any critical framing.[68] For a visitor of this *MoW* page who does not know what the photo captures, the image can be interpreted as an illustration of how *MoW* provided attractive, fun, and educational offers for communities. The large-scale printed picture of POLIN Museum, noticeable in the background, is attached to the back side of the *MoW* pavilion, but here it can be read as a visual cue linking the young people participating in the game in the foreground of the scene with the educational mission of *MoW*. Hundreds of pictures were taken during the three years of *MoW*'s tour, and the selection of this one in particular was certainly not accidental. Visually, it brings together what *MoW* set out to achieve: reaching out to inhabitants of small towns with POLIN's message (symbolised by the photo of the Warsaw museum in the background) and attracting members of local communities, especially youth, into actively participating in organised activities. The text below the photo, only a few paragraphs long, focused precisely on that: educational value, young people, promoting POLIN's message, and engaging small town communities.

Although the content of the webpage was changed in early 2018, in neither the previous nor the new version is the qualitative performance emphasised as strongly as it is elsewhere in the materials about *MoW*. This page seems to be produced more for Polish-speaking internet users than English-speakers: although the English-language summary corresponds with the content of the Polish version, in the English one there are only three links to pages with updates on *MoW*'s tour, such as a summary of the second tour of the

[68]Although the visited locations were mostly small towns and villages, the game was usually called: 'a city game' (*gra miejska*). POLIN Museum staff (from a different department than organisers of *MoW*) offered help to local coordinators who wanted to organise a 'city game' so POLIN's nomenclature has likely contributed to upholding the name. There was only one local coordinator, in Koźminek, who deliberately chose a different name for the activity that in other places was named a 'city game'. The coordinator in Koźminek called the game a 'scavenger hunt' in Polish *podchody*.

museum (POLIN 2018a). On the other hand, the Polish version of the page contains more than thirty links to updates on *MoW*'s tours and other project-related developments (such as an invitation to apply for hosting the museum).

5.3 Quantifying the value of *MoW*'s work

In other contexts, however, Polish-speaking audiences, including local activists collaborating with POLIN on *MoW*, are offered a similar message to that presented for JCH project donors: of successful performance measured in quantifiable value. A map (Figure 4) which I received from *MoW*'s coordinators at POLIN in 2016 illustrates this type of data. This map was originally created and used for English-speaking audiences, but its content is translated from a Polish-language version. A Polish-language version of this map[69] was used for instance during presentations at workshops for local activists which took place each year a few months before a museum's tour in a given year was to start.

I attended two of these workshops, in 2015 and 2017. During the 2017 workshop, which took place at POLIN Museum in Warsaw on January 28th, one of the coordinators of *MoW* from POLIN was delivering a presentation about the projects' aims, and I wrote down in my fieldnotes a couple of numbers she mentioned: of the total number of visitors to *MoW* since it began touring, of towns and villages visited, and educators who participated, among others.

[69]Or its equivalent in a given year. For example, in 2017 a map from 2014-2016 would be shown, in 2016 from 2014-2015 etc.

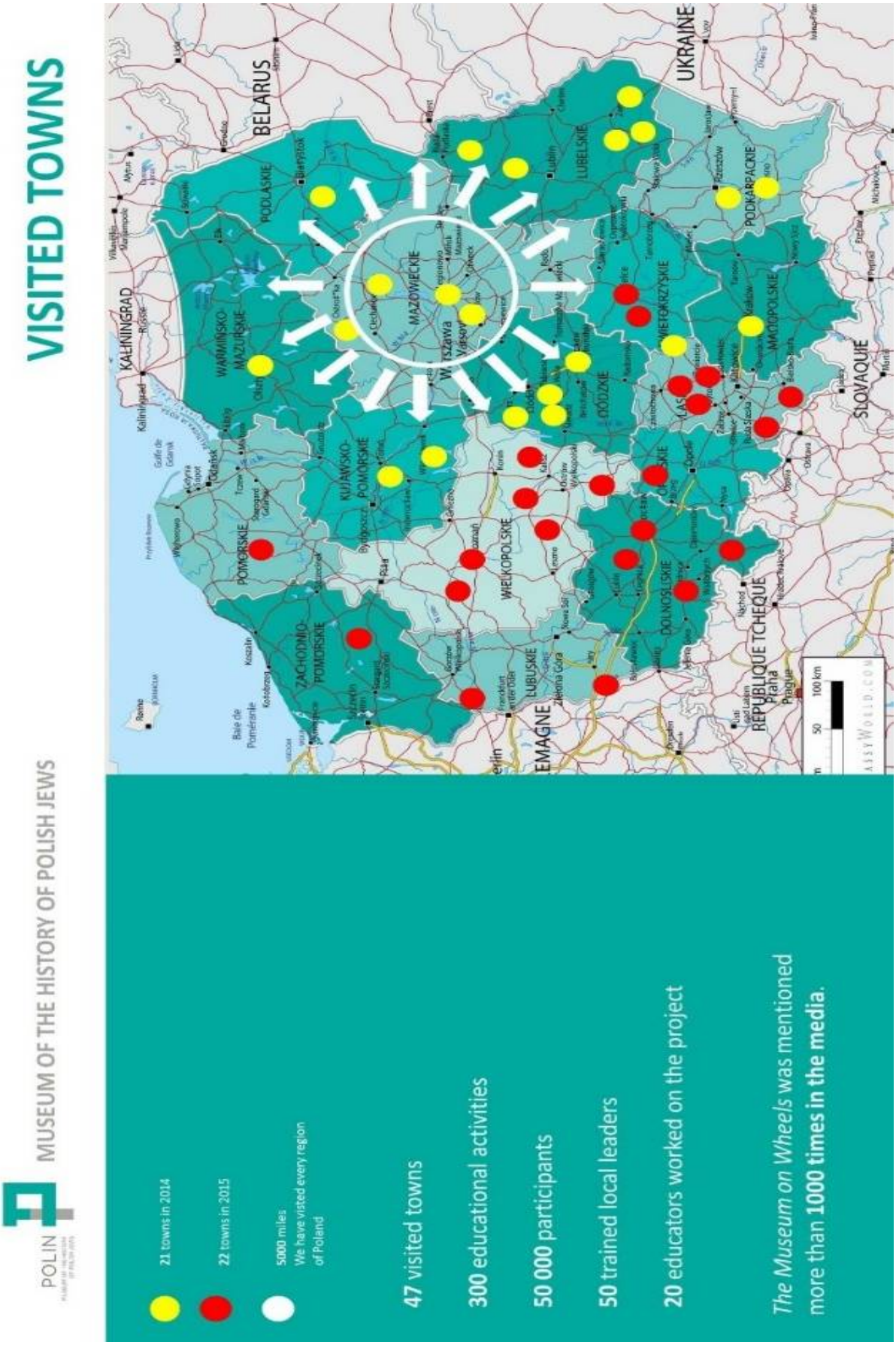

Figure 4: A map of towns visited by *MoW* in 2014 and 2015. Prepared by staff of POLIN Museum. Used with the museum's permission.

What perplexed me, however, was that she also emphasised that the press materials published about *MoW* were worth approximately 1 000 000 PLN (200 000 GBP). She explained that this would be the amount needed if in place of the press materials published one would have paid for advertisements. While this type of information is, perhaps, valuable to donors, I wondered how this helped local activists who attended the workshops to plan the visit of *MoW* in their towns?

Almost a year earlier, on April 1st, a conference was held to conclude *MoW's* 2014 and 2015 tours. Similarly, to the workshops described above, POLIN's staff speeches at the conference once again equated the high quantifiable value (of visitors, press mentions etc) with successful performance. In the welcome speech delivered by Zygmunt Stępiński, the vice-director of POLIN, to the audience which included over thirty local coordinators, some employees of POLIN, journalists, and representatives of the project donors (Norwegian ambassador), explained how successful the project was, for instance by emphasising that *MoW* was mentioned more than 1000 times in the media (press, radio, news websites, television programmes). Although this event was targeted at both local activists and anyone else who was interested to find out more about *MoW* in 2014 and 2015, including journalists and donors' representatives, it seemed that the discourse of quantifiable success was articulated as the key message related to the project, regardless of the audience this message was being addressed to. Although it is certainly not the only element of POLIN's approach to *MoW*, the selected examples show that it did, however, often provide a framework within which the rest of *MoW*'s message and aims were situated.

What was delivered to local activists, journalists and other actors who were in one way or another involved or interested in *MoW*, was a message about the pivotal importance of quantitative success. Jacek Leociak (2015, 585) points to an analogous emphasis of POLIN's institutional discourse in general. Leociak is critical of what he calls, voices of

delight and 'propaganda of success', that POLIN museum's staff articulate about the quality of the institution's work. The emphasis on numbers of participants or visitors who attend museums or join their projects is a widespread phenomenon, as Nina Simon (2010, 16) observes. Simon criticizes placing the focus on visitors' or participants' numbers, as a mode of trivializing the value of the projects that museums do. I agree with both Jacek Leociak's and Nina Simon's identification of the 'propaganda of success', supported first and foremost by numbers, as a problematic and insufficient evaluation of the museum's project value. Focusing on 'quantitative success' inhibits a more multifaceted engagement with the social relevance and potential contributions to the development of communities and individuals through projects such as *Museum on Wheels*. In the following sections I explore one of the ways in which *MoW,* as a new museology outreach initiative, can be grasped beyond its 'quantitative success': I focus on the role of local activists in the project and how they were included (or excluded) throughout various stages of shaping *MoW's* visits and its subsequent impact.

5.4 Converting local activists into managers

As part of *MoW*, POLIN's staff invested much time and effort into reaching out to local communities, often through local media, and using local activists as mediators between Warsaw's museum and the employees of local public institutions, NGOs, and journalists. Yet, as this chapter shows, locals were primarily conceived of as recipients of the content offered by *MoW*, because they did not have access to POLIN's offer otherwise: the assumption was that it had to be brought to them to improve their understanding of the local as well as national history. Throughout the project's duration (2014-2017), there were numerous initiatives undertaken to invite local stories and individuals' voices to be articulated, for example by including a task of collecting oral history interviews as one of the key responsibilities of my role as the researcher in 2015. However, the attempt to include local

voices was not expressed in the overall goals of *MoW*. What was covered in the declared goals of the project was that the engagement of local activists whose work related to Jewish heritage was to be supported through *MoW* (POLIN Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich 2017, 37). Local activists were given a crucial role in the project as mediators between POLIN and the community of their respective town or village. To demonstrate that their participation and contribution was a fundamental part of the collaborative museum-making, I first explore the meaning of activism relevant to Polish/Jewish memory in rural Poland and then explore how the activists' role in *MoW* was framed by POLIN's agenda.

In memory studies, as with feminist studies or studies of social movements, activism is usually associated with resistance to oppression, discrimination or the powerful state-orchestrated policies or narratives (Chidgey 2018, Gutman 2017, Holc 2011, Reading and Katriel 2015). For example, Yifat Gutman (2017) explores how activism is used in Israel-Palestine to highlight a silenced Palestinian history within the dominant collective memory in Israel. She defines memory activism as

> the strategic commemoration of a contested past outside state channels to influence public debate and policy. Memory activists use memory practices and cultural repertoires as means for political ends, often (but not always) in the service of reconciliation and democratic politics. (2017, 1–2)

In Gutman's conceptualisation, memory activism is defined differently from the official, state-run practices of commemoration and is focused on interactive activities that reach inhabitants of sites where conflict or violence took place in the past (2017, 14). In other words, for Gutman, memory activism occurs on the vernacular, non-official level. Memory activists are political actors but "they mobilize the past not for the aim of gaining power and status, but for advancing their moral and ideological visions" (ibid., 19). The neglected or silenced past that they bring to light attracts criticism and rejection, "rather than granting the activists legitimacy and recognition in their society" (ibid.).

The individuals whom I refer to as 'local activists' or 'local memory activists' did not refer to themselves as activists, but I treat them as ones as their involvement, although not necessarily motivations, were in line with how Yifat Gutman defines activism: working outside of official state channels to "influence public debate and policy" (Gutman 2017, 1–2), here related to Polish/Jewish past on the local level. The activities of local activists in this thesis, as the mediators between the communities and the museum, cannot, however always be characterised as attempts to bring to light neglected and/or difficult elements of the collective memory about Jews. In this way, my approach to the notion of activism differs from Gutman's of others writing about memory activism along a similar vein (Chidgey, 2018; Reading and Katriel, 2015). What my research shows is that for some activists highlighting the complexity of the Polish/Jewish past was only one aim: there were also other community-oriented aims and motivations that local activists had for acting as hosts for the itinerant project of POLIN. The background and interest in Polish/Jewish history that these individuals had was not necessarily in line with POLIN's framing of this history. Activists are often perceived as "extraordinary individuals" who might be evaluated against "unreachable standards" (Craddock 2019, 138) and this was often the case for the locals who worked with POLIN to bring the itinerant museum to their towns: they were perceived as particularly involved, interested or active in their communities. Usually, their decisions to invite the itinerant museum to their town was related to the work they had already done in the community in relation to raising local understanding of the Jewish past or the past in general. Their decisions also very often related to the job they had (in a library, school, local museum, NGO), the expectations of their supervisors or a personal interest in creating something new. The activists' backgrounds and motivations are discussed more in-depth in the following chapter: here I focus on the role that POLIN assigned to them in shaping the local visits of *MoW*.

A booklet which concludes the 2014-2017 JCH project states: "The *Museum on Wheels* was also a way of supporting local activists who, often for years, had been involved in preserving the Jewish heritage of their towns" (POLIN Muzeum Historii Żydów Polskich 2017, 37). Local activists who invited *MoW* and committed to working as its 'local coordinators', occupied an in-between position: they were expected to connect the communities and towns or villages in which they live and work with POLIN's agenda. In English, the term 'coordinator' describes "a person whose job is to organize events or activities and to negotiate with others in order to ensure they work together effectively" (Stevenson 2015). The Polish equivalent is *koordynator* which is an Anglicism. In a popular "Polish Scientific Publisher's online dictionary", *koordynator* is defined as "the person that coordinates" (Słownik języka polskiego n.d.), while to coordinate means either "organising activities which are performed by many people together" or "a harmonious course or functioning of something" (Słownik języka polskiego n.d.).

Both the English and Polish definitions of the word stress the organizational, managerial function of a 'coordinator'. Local activists who applied to host *MoW* in their town or village, in relation to the project's visit became 'local coordinators'. Thus, paying close attention to the terminology, they transformed into the local counterparts of the *MoW* project's coordinators at POLIN. Noting the equivalency of job titles to refer to the local activists and to POLIN's staff hints at the expectations of POLIN's staff towards local activists. Furthermore, it can serve as a starting point to explore the institutional discourses of POLIN regarding the socially relevant outreach and empowerment which *MoW* promoted, vis-à-vis the expectations and needs of local activists who invited POLIN to their town or village. In the following sections I argue that the disproportionate levels of responsibility in the relationship between *MoW*'s staff at POLIN and local activists began, paradoxically, with

the equivalency of job titles identified above, and continued in the process of preparing and organizing *MoW*'s local visits.

5.4.2 Equivalency of job tittles

In POLIN's institutional discourses on *Museum on Wheels*, which begins with the application submitted to the EEA and Norway Grants, local activists from towns or villages that were to be visited by the pavilion were referred to as 'local coordinators' or 'coordinators of local activities'. The three full-time positions - created in Warsaw at POLIN – which were included in the grant application were: 'content coordinator of the component', 'assistant of the content coordinator of the component' and 'organisation specialist for the component' (Museum of the History of Polish Jews 2013, 4-5). While engaging with *MoW* in various ways since 2014, I observed that these officially designated titles were used in written communications and in some of the oral communication as well, such as during interviews for media. However, during *MoW*'s tour, where one of the three full-time employed staff was always with the pavilion, the commonly-used term to refer to them was 'the coordinator', or, 'the coordinator from POLIN', to make a distinction between them and 'local coordinators'.[70] While *MoW* was on tour, the responsibility for individuals in both of these roles was to ensure all planned elements were run smoothly and that the work of various people was coordinated.

During *MoW*'s tour, the coordinator from POLIN was the manager of the team that worked for *MoW* in the respective town or village: the educators, technical assistant, night guard and in 2015 also the researcher. The local coordinator (or coordinators) was or were hired on a project-based contract and received a fixed salary for their work. Their responsibility was to plan, organize and disseminate information about accompanying local events, promote *Museum on Wheels* locally, arrange groups' visits to the pavilion, select two

[70]Also in this thesis, as explained earlier, I refer to POLIN's full-time employees responsible for *MoW* as 'coordinators'.

educational workshops to be run and arrange a group to attend each of them. They also provided logistical help and assistance related to *MoW*'s visits: ensuring the pavilion could enter the town on a truck and could be placed in the designated location, assisting with finding accommodation for the team from POLIN, etc. The local coordinators identified and liaised with a partner organization: local government, NGO, school, library or other; which was expected to cover part of the accommodation costs for POLIN's team and contribute to the promotion and broadening the offer of local accompanying events.

Beyond this wide range of responsibilities, local activists who took on the role of local coordinators were also invited to shape some elements of the *MoW* pavilion. In 2014 and 2015 this mostly included providing leaflets or brochures related to Jewish heritage or projects related to it in the specific local context which were then distributed in the pavilion. The local activists were also offered an opportunity to show any relevant short videos or presentations on the screen in the *MoW* pavilion, but nobody used this chance until 2016. In 2016 preparing some material to be shown on the screen became a mandatory element of local coordinators' role and during the 2016 tour all coordinators prepared something. It would be interesting to know why local activists in 2014 and 2015 did not prepare any material to be shown on the screen but seeing how busy and often stressed they were with preparing the visit of *MoW* and its accompanying events, one of the explanations could be that their managerial responsibilities took priority.

Thus, perhaps the opportunity for local activists to showcase what had already been done in the town - in relation to the Jewish heritage or Polish/Jewish past - was only of secondary importance. Since there was much managerial work to do, it simply remained in the background. POLIN's 2018 decision to add an explicit requirement that local coordinators prepare something to be shown on the screen in the *MoW* pavilion, could be perceived as a mode of emphasising the activist 'side' of the coordinators, not only their

managerial role. Importantly, by incorporating this requirement into the local coordinators' role, POLIN overtly acknowledged the work related to Polish/Jewish past already performed on the vernacular level: it was showcased in the *MoW* pavilion, and therefore shown as an element of more of continuous efforts, beyond the ephemeral visit of the museum.

When it came to local events, local activists received some support in planning and preparing the accompanying activities, not only during the workshops at POLIN, but they were also invited to consult with POLIN's staff before submitting the application. Once it was accepted, at any stage the local activists could get in touch with POLIN to get advice on the content and on any organizational issues that could arise (*MoW* coordinator, Female, Warsaw 13.3.2017). This was similarly the case during *MoW*'s stay in each respective town or village – coordinators from POLIN monitored local events and offered help and advice if needed. However, I show below on the basis of ethnographic data gathered in 2015 and 2016, that the concerns about making the local events accompanying *MoW*'s visits relevant to local audiences focused on attracting high numbers of participants, which, in turn, overshadowed the long-term needs and expectations of local activists. Local activists were to primarily invest efforts and time in coordinating the planned concerts, film screenings, city walks, lectures, workshops or other accompanying events that they chose; and the main channel to articulate the long-term needs or expectations which they brought into the project was through these local events.

5.4.3 Short-term managers and long-term activists

During each year of the *Museum on Wheels* project, local activists who were interested in hosting the museum in their town were asked to submit an application which included questions about their experience and motivation, cultural needs in the town, local history related to the former Jewish inhabitants, and finally the specific ideas and plans the applicants had for running activities to accompany *MoW*. A few of the local activists who submitted

successful applications in 2015 agreed to share their applications with me. These applications, together with interviews I conducted during the visit of *MoW* in the town or village and the follow-up contact via email or Skype after *MoW's* visit, offer invaluable insight into the local activists' perspective and the contexts they were embedded in.

For instance, in Koźminek, the visit of *MoW* was the first time that the town's Jewish past emerged in the public space – in the form of not only the pavilion, but also a happening, a concert, a scavenger hunt and a film screening, among other things.[71] In the application submitted to POLIN, two local activists explained that they invited *MoW* with the hope that the project would encourage more locals to join the efforts in discovering and promoting knowledge about the heritage of the different cultural and religious groups which used to inhabit the town. The activists emphasised the complexity of the Polish/Jewish memoryscape, which includes stereotypes, misconceptions, hostility, violence as well as tolerance or friendship. They also saw articulating stories about Jews which are excluded from the official narratives about the past in the town as a necessary first step towards including them and understanding the local past:

> We wish that we would begin talking about our shared history, of the Jews and the Poles, about these bad as well as good relations. That we step out of the local stereotypes, that we begin looking at the past in a different way. Make history alive. (…) Our point is that we would start contemplating, talking, because even through this we are going to become embedded in the history of Jews in our town. Thanks to that we will be able to find out more about ourselves. (Interviewee J and Interviewee S 2015, 17)

The aims of local activists resonate with POLIN Museum's focus: promoting knowledge about Jewish history and culture in Poland. The other element of *MoW*'s agenda, which was supporting local activists already working on the topic, was also crucial for the activists who applied from Koźminek. For them, hosting *MoW* was one of the first activities run in connection to the Jewish past and generally, since there were very few cultural

[71]One of the activists explained to me, that it is not called 'a city game' deliberately, because "Koźminek is not a city", she explained (Interviewee S, Female, Koźminek, 26.5.2015). Other local activists working with *MoW* were not so reflexive about the name of this activity and elsewhere it was called 'a city game', like for example in Łazy analysed in the previous section.

opportunities in Koźminek, *MoW* could be an attractive initiative for the locals. They thought they learned a lot from POLIN's staff about project management, and through participating in *MoW* they received a lot of inspiration and ideas for their future involvement locally (Interviewee J, Female, Koźminek, 26.05.2015; Interviewee S, Female, Koźminek, 26.05.2015).

MoW's staff working in and on Koźminek were pleased with the museum's visit to this village, even to the extent that the documentary film screened as one of the local events was described by POLIN's coordinators of *MoW* in informal conversations as one of the most successful accompanying events of the 2015 tour. Thus, on many levels the expectations and needs of local activists and the goals of POLIN related to this project were consistent. However, in Koźminek, as in many other towns visited by *MoW,* local activists who coordinated the project treated *MoW* as just one of many steps, in the development process of including Jews into the local memoryscape. They envisioned building more inclusive collective memory on the vernacular level where the exclusions, misconceptions and stereotypes about Jews would be challenged: *MoW* provided an opportunity to begin this process.

Local activists, like those in Koźminek, often had a long-term perspective in mind and hoped that *MoW* could contribute to the long-term processes of nourishing an interest in the local past, knowledge, curiosity and openness. As an ephemeral intervention, which was one of the steps in this long process, *MoW* was effective: it was highly visible in the town and posed questions about Jewish past. Yet, while in POLIN's main educational goals the hope to contribute to a more open, less xenophobic society are also articulated in the long framework, the other aim of *MoW*, supporting local activists, was rather short-term oriented. And it is this second part of *MoW*'s goal that took prevalence in the collaborative process of museum-making, as I show in this chapter. I explain this further below.

POLIN sought to support local activists in creating the accompanying events of *MoW,* and in this way contribute to increasing some of their skills or knowledge. The 'educational' element of *MoW* was largely treated as a responsibility of POLIN, through the content of exhibitions presented and the involvement of educators. These two sides seemed somewhat separate, although local activists were also invited to contribute to the content of the pavilion with a presentation showcasing what had been done in the town so far, as I discussed above. Nonetheless, local activists, as managers of local events, were expected to focus on ensuring that everything ran smoothly in relation to the events. Coordinating all the elements of *MoW's* educational offer was the responsibility of POLIN's staff. By separating these responsibilities and stressing the managerial position of local activists as an essential part of their role, POLIN inhibited the opportunities of these activists to co-create the educational offer of *MoW*. In this sense, the participation of local activists who became coordinators in shaping *MoW* as a whole was to a large extent managerial.

For instance, in Pińczów, the local coordinator at the end of *MoW*'s visit explained that participating in the project gave her a chance to develop skills in project management, and she was glad she had a chance to run events independently, without others in her organization telling her what to do. When I asked her what she will remember most from the project and how it mattered for her she answered:

> (...) that I could spread my wings a bit more. That the director had said to me that he is not going to interfere, and he allows me to do it my way, I was delighted. That it will not be imposed on me, that this person will come, do the Jewish dances, so maybe we would do the cuisine or maybe X will come and do the papercutting [workshop]. No, and I did it how I wanted to. (Interviewee U, Female, Pińczów, 01.07.2015)

Many local coordinators I interviewed in 2015 expressed similar views: that participating in *MoW* as a local coordinator was in one way or another a chance for them to learn about project management, develop some connections locally, and get ideas and inspiration from others, especially from POLIN's staff. However, at the same time, the local activists who

became coordinators in their town or village for *Museum on Wheels* often expressed hope that after the museum's visit they would be able to collaborate with POLIN on further projects. The commonly-identified need was skills and knowledge, which were needed to develop local educational projects, such as running workshops for children and young people.

One of the local activists from Koźminek told me in a follow-up conversation via email that she keeps herself informed about POLIN's educational programs and attends some of the workshops or meetings. However, she regretted that more practical support for people working in small towns is missing from POLIN's offer:

> I am still interested in the museum's offer, workshops, discussions. I think that what I would need apart from that is something about how to talk about the importance of Jewish communities in small towns. How to talk to those who are unconvinced. Help in preparing educational activities about multicultural past and the present.[72] (Interviewee S, e-mail, 05.04.2017)

Another strand of POLIN's activity that was indicated as a sphere of interest for activists in their local work was research and archives. When the local coordinator in Białowieża described her plans for engaging further in exploring the history of the diverse cultural, religious and national groups inhabiting the town, and working towards including these stories into the narratives about Białowieża, she mentioned that she would really like to receive more help from POLIN in her endeavours:

> I have a lot of content-based research issues, which I would like to occupy myself with, but without the help of some supervisor and support I cannot do it. And to tell the truth I am trying to ask for this at POLIN Museum and it has not been successful so far. And I am a bit disappointed, if I can say something (…) because I think that, oh darn, well, if the museum is there to do something then it is also to support this kind of local activist. And I do not have this support, I do not have this feeling. (Interviewee T, Female, Białowieża, 30.09.2017)

She then added that she did have a positive experience with getting support from a person working at POLIN, but that this person did so mostly outside of the museum's structure: this

[72]The interviewee used the word *wielokulturowy* most likely to refer to ethnic pluralism, rather than sought to make a claim about the political and legal framework and the position of minorities in it in Poland in the past.

was not part of his professional responsibilities, it was more that he contributed in his private time. She went on:

> I have a feeling that I am reinventing a wheel which is already invented, losing completely unnecessarily the energy, and if someone would show it to me (..) then I would surely more easily get to (…) to things which are perhaps to be researched. (Interviewee T, Female, Białowieża, 30.09.2017)

For POLIN, *Museum on Wheels* was a short-term intervention and the focus was placed on what can be done and completed in the few days that the pavilion and *MoW* team stayed in the town or village. Following the requirements of the donors and of POLIN Museum, in evaluating the performance of *MoW* the numbers of visitors, participants, mentions in the media were perceived as measurements of success. Thus, ensuring the 'quantitative success' of the project was one of the key elements in the role of local activists employed by POLIN as short-term coordinators. In the engagement of local activists with *MoW*, 'coordination' was prioritised, and local activists were seen as equal partners in the project, but only as far as managing it is concerned.

Yet, when it comes to the specific long-term local needs and expectations related to the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence, which, as I showed using examples above, might be identified and articulated within the framework of *MoW*'s ephemeral intervention, the evidence suggests they were of secondary importance in the collaborative process. Certainly, in many of the towns or villages I visited with *MoW*, local activists articulated some of their concerns and issues related to their engagement in discovering and promoting the narratives about the diverse groups, especially Jews which used to form part of the local population but who are no longer there. Often POLIN's educators or coordinators offered some ideas or suggestions on how to approach these and where to search for support. For example, one of the educators told me how in September 2016 during the visit of *MoW* in Markowa, he helped the employees of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles saving Jews during WW2 to develop their educational offer so that it matched the learning capacities of students

of various ages better (Educator A, Male, Radzyń Podlaski, 2.10.2016). Still, the support given to local activists remained focused on short-term interventions; there was no long-term collaboration program incorporated into the structure of *Museum on Wheels*.

This is not to say that long-term collaboration is necessary in outreach projects, but rather to point out that the expectations of various individuals which are invited to engage in an initiative as partners would usually vary. In the case of *MoW*, those local activists' expectations, which went beyond quantitative short-term success, were inhibited by the framework imposed by institutional discourses, donors' requirements and the mode of participation of local activists defined by POLIN. This is a commonplace in collaborative projects run by museums, and as Robin Boast (2011, 58) argues, "the intellectual control has largely remained in the hands of the museum". Here in the engagement of local activists, 'coordination' tasks were prioritised: even though the local activists joined the project on equal positions to POLIN's staff through transforming into 'local coordinators', this came at the expense of their role as individuals who strive to transform the local memoryscapes.

5.5 Conclusions

This chapter explored the tension between POLIN Museum's agenda and approach as demonstrated in *Museum on Wheels* and the modes in which local activists got engaged in this travelling initiative. Local activists played a key role in shaping *MoW* locally, and their position was discussed here paying close attention to the community-orientation in museums' work (Crooke 2011), and to notions of 'coordination' and 'participation' (N. Simon 2010). *MoW* claimed to be working with local activists and supporting them in their work and ideas, but, as I demonstrated, the structure of the project put significant restrictions on how this collaboration could develop. As an effect, local activists remained one of the actors in the process, brought into the initiative at only certain moments with limited responsibilities and decisive power. It is POLIN's staff who made the decisions as to at which points and to what

extent local activists would be involved in running *MoW*. I showed how the relationship between local activists and *MoW*'s staff imposed certain understandings of POLIN's agenda on the local level. Even though *Museum on Wheels'* agenda emphasised educational aims and a supportive role of the project for local activists, the overarching agenda of POLIN and of the donors sponsoring the itinerant museum turned out as the most prevalently articulated element in *MoW*'s message and local engagement.

I argued that for *MoW*, the relations in which the project was embedded (with POLIN's agenda, funder's policies and requirements, Polish socio-political context), disrupted its potential to put the ideals of community-oriented and participatory 'new museum' in practice. By analysing some institutional discourses of POLIN on *MoW* (website, presentations) I demonstrated how the expectations of POLIN's management, and of the donor organisations, shaped the framework for how *Museum on Wheels* developed the model for collaboration with local activists. Local activists focused on 'coordinating' the visit of *MoW*. Thus their capacity to address more long-term needs and expectations including developing ways to acknowledge and deal with the complexity of vernacular collective memory about Jews was limited. The latter thus remained of secondary importance as their time and energy was focused on managing, arranging and administrating.

Overall, my analysis showed that in the case of *MoW* focusing on 'quantitative success' put constrains on a multifaceted engagement with the rural communities in Poland. While I do not seek to evaluate or make recommendations related to *Museum on Wheels*, my aim is more to demonstrate how various elements of the project's structure and management influence one another, and what effects this might have had on reaching the goals declared by the travelling museum. The next chapter supplements the analysis of the role of local activists provided here by examining the locally-run accompanying events which were one of the core responsibilities of the local coordinator's role.

CHAPTER SIX Addressing Jewish absence in collaborative museum-making

POLIN Museum promotes itself as a 'Museum of life' (POLIN Museum 2016) as I explained in Chapter Two. The emphasis is placed on the thousand years of Jewish presence in Poland and the idea is "to resist an overwhelming teleological narrative driving inexorably to the Holocaust as an inevitable endpoint for the preceding millennium of Jewish history" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2015b, 273). However, in this chapter and the following ones, I show that the Holocaust was, nonetheless, crucial for the local engagements with *MoW* because it was a central element in the collective memory about Jews on the vernacular level. In this chapter I focus on the local events which activists designed and ran during the visits of the itinerant museum. I demonstrate that while POLIN and its travelling museum accentuated the centuries of Jewish presence in Poland, the encounters with local narratives about Jews in the framework of *MoW* instead tended to articulate the absence of Jews in the present-day memoryscapes. I explore these encounters with local narratives by analysing selected local accompanying events organised by the activists who collaborated with POLIN Museum as local coordinators.

The story offered by POLIN in its travelling pavilion of *MoW* finishes with optimistic messages looking to the future, concerned with the thriving development of Jewish communities in urban centres. However, in this chapter I show that in responses by locals to the *MoW*, it was not the continuity of Jewish presence in the local memoryscape that was crucial but articulating the absence and void left after the Holocaust. Yet, for the museum this vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence was recognised as a central element of the story only in as far as it was contributed to making *MoW* a popular project which attracted numerous visitors. I argue that POLIN overlooked the tension which appeared between the

museum's focus on the message of continuity, Jewish life and presence and the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence.

The first section of this chapter explains how POLIN's emphasis on continuity, Jewish culture and traditions produced a tension with this vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence. In this way, focusing on the positive message of a centuries-long presence of Jews in Poland is potentially problematic because, as Jacek Leociak (2015) observed, engaging in a serious reflection on the Jewish/Polish past should be encouraged by POLIN's projects. For POLIN's employees, local events were part of the program of *MoW*'s visit, but POLIN's staff did not take responsibility for them. Local activists were to run the events with only limited support from POLIN's staff, as explained in the previous chapter. But although POLIN sought to delegate responsibility for the local program to activists it cooperated with in each town, for the communities that *MoW* visited both the locally-run accompanying activities and the offer of POLIN remained part of the same ephemeral event. Thus, I analyse these two elements as one intervention, led by *MoW*, because I am interested in productive reception: how individuals engaged with the project and how these engagements contributed to the local memoryscapes. In the second section of the chapter I discuss how Polish/Jewish past was articulated in the local events accompanying *MoW*'s visits. I demonstrate that the focus of artistic performances, workshops, presentations or other events organised by local activists, differed from POLIN's key message of continuity of Jewish life and instead highlighted the prevalence of the preoccupation with Jewish absence. To articulate this vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence, both allosemitic tropes as well as more complex and critical ones were used.

With regards to the broader argument of this thesis, this chapter provides an understanding of the tension between stories about Polish/Jewish past in exhibitions, artistic performances, lectures, and games articulated by POLIN and by locals in the collaborative

making of *MoW*. Analysing the local accompanying events which are the local 'additions' to the itinerant project allows me to illustrate the interaction between POLIN's stories and the tropes prevalent in the vernacular collective memory about Jews.

6.2 'Museum of life' in tension with the absence of Jews

To begin with, the stories presented by POLIN Museum put an emphasis on 'Jewish life', as well as the continued presence of Jews in Poland for centuries. However, this narrative is not as straightforward as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's quote mentioned in Chapter Two may suggest. Writing about the permanent exhibition of POLIN Museum, Małgorzata Szpakowska (2015, 574) observes that the story of the Holocaust is not confined to dedicated sections of the exhibition, but it is demonstrated also elsewhere:

> from the start [of the exhibition] it is the void that reminds us about it. Lack of material artefacts, the presence of too few, and rather accidental items. As if the memory about the life of Polish Jews has been erased, buried. Like these matzevot converted into pavement blocs.

Jacek Leociak (2015), who together with Barbara Engelking curated the Holocaust Gallery in the Core Exhibition of POLIN Museum, argues along similar lines, claiming that the treatment of the Holocaust in POLIN's overall agenda is problematic. Analysing, among others, the museum's approach to its location at the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto and POLIN's promotional film, he shows that the Holocaust[73] is pushed aside from the museum's main message because it does not fit the positive and future-oriented idea of a 'Museum of life'. Leociak writes (ibid., 585):

> I understand that this is supposed to be a MUSEUM OF LIFE. One cannot pretend, though, that there is continuity in Polish-Jewish history, that nothing has happened. Polish Jews, European Jews have really been exterminated. What has remained after them is a

[73]In the original Polish text, the notion used is not 'Holocaust' but '*Zagłada*', which literally means extermination, annihilation. Dorota Głowacka observes that as before 1989 the term '*Zagłada Żydów'* was most common in use to denote 'the Holocaust of the Jews', then in the 1990s it was often replaced by the Holocaust "an American import" (2013, 203). She writes "maybe because of that distancing (defense mechanism?) via English language 'my Holocaust' became a current topic [of cultural texts and journalistic articles]" (ibid.). On the other hand, after the year 2000, the term '*Zagłada*' is again employed in interactions in the public sphere and an example can be the name of the main centre for research of the Holocaust in Poland established in Warsaw: *Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów* (the Centre for the Research of the Holocaust of Jews).

> void. This rupture is an indefeasible element of the thinking about Jews, about the Polish-Jewish history. Without that the whole story about 1000 years of the history of Jews on these territories is pretend and artificial. Without the actual void, the phenomenon of the revival of Jewish life here and now cannot be understood. Remaining silent about the Holocaust dramatically reduces the field of influence of the museum. Should the serious reflection on the fates of Jews and Poles living together and living apart be replaced by sentimental stories?

This observation is certainly relevant to *Museum on Wheels'* agenda and exhibition, as I show in this chapter, by reflecting on the stories presented in the pavilion and by analysing some of the local events run to accompany *MoW*'s visits.

In the small towns that *MoW* visited, the post-Holocaust void was perhaps more obvious, but at the same time the topic is relatively underexplored when compared to urban centres such as Warsaw. One of the educators working for POLIN Museum reflected on the memory about Jews in small towns as follows:

> I am from Warsaw, I am from a big city, and it looks very different in Warsaw (...) and very different in this kind of smaller towns. (…) I am under the impression that this story is somewhat more alive in these towns, somehow more individual, personalized. It is not that almost 350 000 Warsaw Jews died during the war, but there are somehow particular people (..) it is clear that it is emotional, that it is somehow a bit pushed out, also part of the people is more interested, precisely there are these various, maybe not entirely worked through, things, but on the very personal and individual level. (..) it is very much alive. In a way it is not, on one hand, materially it is not there a bit, but there is a lot that is stifling in there. (Educator B, Female, Przeworsk 14.9.2016).

In many places in rural Poland, the Holocaust is the end of the story of and about local Jews, of the story of a Jewish presence, of the existence of a local Jewish community. Yet, the former Jewish presence and the Holocaust remain in the physical space and in the social interactions of local communities in various ways. This collective memory on the vernacular level is composed of both material elements, such as Jewish buildings, objects, written and visual discourse about Jews in these towns, as well as the stories which are told, changed and collaboratively concealed or forgotten. "A lot that is stifling in there" that the educator refers to is precisely this preoccupation with Jewish absence which this thesis discusses.

What the locals concentrated on was dealing with the void and absence of Jews in the present, even if this absence was made obvious through describing their past presence in exhibitions and other events. In its exhibition, *MoW,* just like POLIN Museum, highlighted the centuries long Jewish presence in Poland, completing the chronological narrative with stories about Jewish communities in Poland in the 21st century and their cultural and religious life (see Figure 7). Yet, this Jewish life, if one relies on the exhibition housed in the itinerant pavilion, thrives in Warsaw and other urban centres, not in the small towns which are the key targets for *Museum on Wheels* (see Figure 8). Small towns and villages visited by *MoW* were excluded from this story of ongoing presence, because they are not sites for the continuous development of Jewish life in the present with an outlook towards the future. They do not fit into the story. They are sites of Jewish absence in the present and will most likely remain so for the future.

It is important to note that, even though it was not as fundamental as POLIN's messages about Jewish presence on Polish territories and contributions to developments in culture, economy, politics, absence was nonetheless addressed in the exhibition in some way. Specifically, it was exposed by presenting small towns as the setting for Jewish life in the past through two central elements of the exhibition: a model of a shtetl from the early 20th century and the local map, different for each respective town visited.[74] The miniature 3D model of a shtetl from the early 20th century (Figure 5) could be rearranged by visitors: they were invited to touch and move buildings, read descriptions below them and look at related archival photos placed under the model buildings. The descriptions painted a picture of a multi-religious society of the Second Republic of Poland, where many cultures and religions were present, and many languages were in use.[75] Then, the location-specific, interactive map

[74]The educators referred to it as shtetl and explained to the visitors that this means a typical small Polish/Jewish town.

[75]Interestingly, until October 2015 there was no Orthodox Church model included even though, especially in Eastern Poland, there were and, in some places, still are substantial Orthodox communities. It was added after a

(Figure 6), which depicted sites related to the history of the local Jewish community in the town, usually also highlighted events and sites related to the Holocaust and emphasised how it brought an end to the presence of that local Jewish community.

By incorporating these two elements into the exhibition, *MoW* invited locals to create memory about Jews collaboratively. The 3D shtetl model was generic and designed by POLIN's team, but while the interactive map relied to some degree on the contributions of locals. The collaborative process of creating the map evolved from year to year, but the general procedure was that a researcher employed by POLIN prepared the maps (locations, text, pictures) before each tour, using materials from POLIN's website Virtual Shtetl, but also by gathering additional information from local activists and anyone else they knew with relevant content.

Thus, in this way some of the vernacular resources and knowledge were used in preparing these maps. The visitors were then also invited to contribute, or update stories presented on the interactive map, and the educator or coordinators would usually change it there and then, given they were able to verify the information elsewhere. The Jewish absence and void were principal themes on most of the maps I saw in 2014, 2015 and 2016: places where ghettos were created, where Jews were murdered, were usually marked, together with stories about the Jewish community and their properties characteristics. The Holocaust was depicted as the end or prelude to the end of the existence of these local Jewish communities. In the following section I explore how local events, which, similarly to the map created collaboratively by locals and POLIN, highlighted the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence. However, it did so in a different way: by stressing some of the prevalent modes in which non-Jews depict Jews and struggle with difficult Polish/Jewish memory.

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local activist who worked with POLIN as a local activist/coordinator from Białowieża pointed it out to the organizer and asked them to add it.

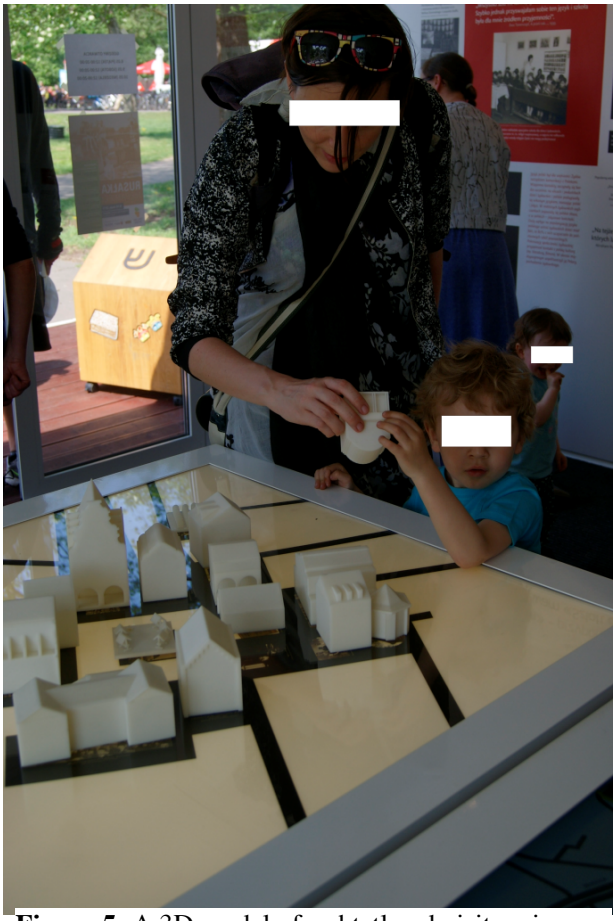

Figure 5: A 3D model of a shtetl and visitors in Poznań, May 2015.

Figure 6: The interactive map depicting locations related to Poznań's Jewish community, May 2015.

Figure 7: The timeline highlighting the 21 selected important events in the history of Jews in Poland, Przeworsk, September 2016. All descriptions are on black text fields and the Holocaust is the one on red background.

Figure 8: *MoW* pavilion, Przeworsk, September 2016. Showing: the panel with quotes of young Polish Jews, photos from the Museum and a map indicating all the towns already visited by *MoW*. The quotes used originate from Katka Reszke's book "Powrót Żyda" (The Return of the Jew) and they reflect on Jewish identity, culture and religion in contemporary Poland but largely refer to big cities.

6.3 Articulating the preoccupation with Jewish absence in 2015

Local events which accompanied the visit of *Museum on Wheels* in each respective site, were planned and run by local activists who hosted *MoW* in that town, as explained in Chapter Five. In the application process, local activists who wanted to invite *MoW* were asked to propose at least one accompanying (or side) event which was to take place during the museum's visit, but usually there were three, four, or even more events proposed and organised. The events that were described in the application were one of the elements on the basis of which the committee at POLIN selected towns to be visited in a given year. Another key criterion was the location of the town from which local activists applied: each year the competition opened to only a select number of regions in the country. For instance, in 2015, visits took place in the North and West of Poland (in chronological order of *MoW*'s visit): Pomeranian, West Pomeranian, Greater Poland, Lubusz, Lesser Poland, Opole, Silesian, Świętokrzyskie (Kubica 2015). In the following paragraphs, I focus on the 2015 tour of *MoW* because that year I accompanied *MoW* for most of its tour. Thus, I am able to identify larger trends and compare a number of towns drawing on a broad range of ethnographic data I gathered from a substantial period of time (more than two months).

In 2015, *MoW* visited 22 towns in the North and East of Poland, of which 18 were small towns and villages of up to 50,000 inhabitants. The data from these 18 is of particular interest to this thesis due to its focus on rural areas. In 2015, when asked for the criteria they used to design local events in their town, local activists most often answered that their aim was to attract participants of all ages. Thus, there were usually diverse activities proposed which were meant to target different age groups. In more than half of the towns (ten) some kind of artistic performance was organised – a concert, dance performance, a cabaret. Among other popular types of events were exhibitions on topics related to the former Jewish inhabitants (nine towns), guided walks (eight towns), lectures (eight towns), city games

(seven towns),[76] screenings of films about, or presentations on, memories of or about former Jewish inhabitants (six towns), culinary workshops and Jewish cuisine tastings (six towns) (Kubica 2015).[77] The performances, walks, workshops were loosely connected to Jewish culture, or rather, to what the organisers or performers perceived as Jewish culture. Over the next sections, the themes and treatment of 'Jewishness' in some of these events are discussed using the examples of Łazy and Koźminek, and I show how these events illustrate the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence.

When in 2015 I worked for *MoW*, one of my tasks was to compile reports from each town visited and to prepare a final report covering all towns visited in that year. Local side events run during the three days' visit of *MoW* were among the items that each report covered. In this section I rely largely on the data from these unpublished reports I prepared for POLIN Museum, but I also use my fieldnotes gathered during that period as well as interviews I conducted and any other relevant materials I collected, such as brochures or posts published on Facebook. I selected two towns to analyse here: Koźminek and Łazy, which both were visited by *MoW* in 2015 and are described in Appendix Four. The analysis shows some of the ways in which local narratives and local events varied between towns visited by *MoW*. These two towns were selected because they are different from one another in their geopolitical history of the 19th and 20th centuries (the former belonged to the Prussian Empire and the latter to Tsarist Russia), which is linked to the demography of the local populations and religions that were represented (see Appendix Four).

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[76]Although the visited locations were mostly small towns and villages, the game was usually called: 'a city game'. POLIN Museum staff (from a different department than organisers of *MoW*) offered help to local coordinators/activists who wanted to organise a 'city game' so POLIN's nomenclature has likely contributed to upholding the name. There was only one local activist, in Koźminek, who deliberately chose a different name for the activity that in other places was named a 'city game'. The activist in Koźminek called the game a 'scavenger hunt' in Polish *podchody*.

[77]Apart from running the local events designed by them for their particular town, local activists also chose the two workshops for locals that were to be conducted by POLIN's educators for small pre-booked groups (such as school groups). A list of the workshops available in 2015 and 2016 can be found in Appendix Three. *MoW* also offered additional elements that the local activists could add to the local programme if they wished to. The list of those events available in 2015 and 2016 is also available in Appendix Three.

Yet, Łazy and Koźminek share many characteristics in their present-day memoryscapes: in both, Jews are absent and there are locals who seek to include Jews and other former non-Catholic inhabitants into prevalent narratives about local past. Furthermore, in both towns little was achieved in recovering and promoting Jewish/Polish past in material and non-material forms, due to various reasons of which some are elaborated below. Analysing the visit of *MoW* in Koźminek and Łazy, reveals the disparity between local narratives about Jews and POLIN's agenda. While I do not seek to make general claims, which are to apply to *MoW*'s visits everywhere, I do identify some trends in the thematic focus of the locally-run events and contrast them with POLIN's focus. This contributes to my overall argument that there is a tension between the vernacular level of collective memory about Jews and POLIN's agenda and story about the continuity of Jewish life and Jewish culture that *MoW* as part of POLIN is supposed to promote.

6.3.1 Łazy: making Jews familiar

In Łazy, three events were run by the local activist/coordinator: a presentation of video-recorded oral history interviews (this took place twice), a city game and a concert of klezmer music.[78] Most of the accompanying events run by the local coordinator took place on the same day, Friday the 26th of June in the afternoon and evening: a city game, a concert and a film screening. The presentations were delivered twice: once on the day before *MoW* came to Łazy, and once on the first day of the visit in the afternoon. The presentation, city game, and concert, so the three events run by the local coordinator, demonstratively emphasised the absence of Jews in Łazy. As I show below, this was done in a nostalgic mode, reproducing

[78]Apart from this, as in every other small town visited, there were two workshops run by POLIN's educators, and here the local coordinator chose a workshop for children (7-9 years old) "We are building a shtetl" and another one for adults (all participants were female, most of them older than 65 and two around 30), "Learning about the Jewish world". Then, like in almost all visited small town that year (except for the first town visited in 2015, Pleszew), the exhibition "They risked their lives (...)" which is analysed in Chapter Eight, was shown. Furthermore, a screening of Pawlikowski's film *Ida* was arranged.

allosemitic representations of Jews and presenting antisemitic stereotypes without problematizing them.

The presentation of the oral history interviews entitled "Z kart historii… mieszkali obok nas" (From the pages of history… They lived next to us.) was labelled as a 'lecture' in the program of the local activist/coordinator. I observed the second of the two events. The audience was composed of around 20 people: a few adults (few above 60 and the rest 40-60 years old) and more than 10 primary school children (8-13) with three adult women who were their group leaders. As mentioned already, it was rather a presentation of selected video recorded material than a lecture. The presenter introduced the collection and talked about how she gathered the interviews: she explained that it grew out of her interest in the past and conversations she liked having with older people who could remember what happened in the town before she was born. She said she recorded tens of interviews with older people in Łazy who were willing to recall their youth and what the town looked like back then. For the presentation she selected some stories about local Jews, and she showed them one after the other, without much commentary. For instance, I wrote in my fieldnotes "one of the interviewees was explaining how Jews were buried in a sitting position – in one hand they were holding sand and in the other money, so that they could pay/bribe and the sand they could throw into Goy's eyes, so they could be faster than non-Jews". Although such depiction of Jewish burial traditions is incorrect and is an element of the mythological folklore thinking in the Polish countryside (Kapralski 2015, 16; Cała 1995),[79] the activist did not rectify this misconception, neither did she do it with any other misconceptions that were reproduced in the material she presented.

[79]Sławomir Kapralski (2015, 16) interprets the trope of burial in the allegedly sitting position as an element of the antagonistic depiction of Jewish and Christian traditions. In this case, Jews are perceived as cunning by preparing their dead to rise quicker (than Christians who bury the dead in the laying down position) on the Judgement Day.

There were also other statements in the footage which articulated modern antisemitism, for instance related to trade, money and economy in general (Żukowski 2002) such as "the Jews <*Żydki*>[80] were always selling to the Poles at a higher price", "their rabbi did not teach them knowledge, but taught them knowledge about trade". There were also statements linked with the Holocaust, one interviewee shown in the presentation said: "if there was no war here for two or three years more, it would be hard here for the Jews". This could imply that the respondent thought that there was much hostility towards Jews or even that the extermination of Jews in the Holocaust was desirable. Following Sławomir Kapralski, depictions of the Holocaust as a supported development in Poland can be interpreted as an element of a balancing or justifying explanation. Namely, the antisemitic logic would suggest that, if Jewish Poles were cunning, and wanted to control the economy and cheat non-Jewish Poles, then the hostility and violence against them, including the Holocaust, were events that balanced out Jewish misbehaviour (as perceived by non-Jews) (Kapralski 2015, 28). None of these statements, and those are only the examples that I wrote down in my fieldnotes, were commented on or criticized by the activist.

One of these stereotypes, regarding the connection between Jews, money and trade, was built into another local event: the city game. The game was prepared by the local coordinator together with the local scouts' group, and it attracted children, teenagers and seniors (65+). The participants were sent in teams to find four locations in the town related to Jewish heritage, and in each of these places there was a person who told them a story about that place and gave them a task to complete. One of these locations was at the main pedestrian street of Łazy, where Jewish shops used to be located. When they arrived there, the task that the groups were set involved throwing coins into a cup, bringing up an association of Jews with money and trade, thus playing on the stereotype. Here again, the

[80]*Żydki* in Polish is a pejorative term used for Jews.

stereotypical trope that this task highlighted was not contextualised or explained by anyone to the participants of the game. The activity of throwing the coins into a cup by one of the teams was captured by a POLIN photographer and was later used on the *Museum on Wheels* website. In Chapter Five I analysed the photo and how it was used by POLIN Museum.

The concert that was scheduled just after the city game was given by musicians associated with the local community house (see Figure 9). The songs played are commonly associated with Jews in the mainstream culture in Poland: for example, pieces from the musical "Fiddler on the Roof",[81] which were played during the concert in Łazy, were played during most of the other 10 artistic performances organized as local events of *MoW*'s 2015 tour. Apart from the soundtrack from the musical, many performed pieces had sad, melancholic undertones, similarly as in the programmes of other concerts organized at the 2015's tour. This highlights the prevalence of the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence: it can be seen as an attempt to articulate the void by the performers and to connect to the audience's need to uphold the positive image of themselves and their community in relation to Jews. Even if the Holocaust was not explicitly mentioned in these events, it was still the fundamental element of the locals' connection to the Jewish/Polish past because of the void it left.

Yet, on the other hand, the general aim of the activist who ran local events and invited *MoW* was to contribute to a more inclusive narrative about the past in Łazy, in which Jews would be part of the story. It seems, then, that what was lacking for the activist was the knowledge, expertise and awareness to be able to make use of the visit of *MoW* to facilitate a transformation of the vernacular collective memory narratives about Jews. Specifically, it was knowledge and awareness about how allosemitic tropes influence collective memory

[81]"Fiddler on the Roof" on the basis of Sholem Aleichem's book "Tewje der Milchiker" has been for the last few decades a very popular musical in Poland, it has been adapted and staged in more than 10 theatres around Poland since the 1980s.

about Jews in Poland and in her town, and how understanding this could be used to create a more inclusive and critical memoryscape, where the complexity of the Polish/Jewish past would be acknowledged.

Figure 9: Preparations for the concert in Łazy, June 2015. The *MoW* pavilion is in the background. Photo taken by Zosia Biernacka Downloaded from the Facebook page of *MoW* and used with the permission of the museum.

6.3.2 'Jewishness' nostalgically defined by non-Jews

The approach to the 'Jewish themes' in some of the local events in Łazy bears many characteristics of what Sandra Lustig (2009, 81) describes as 'disneyfication': "the phenomenon of artefacts, food, music and cultural events being marketed as though they were 'authentically Jewish' or part of a Jewish context, while in fact neither is the case". I am aware that 'disneyfication' or 'disneyization' is a term originating in media studies and theories of consumerism (Bryman 1999), but I use it strictly following Lustig's definition and

in this way I find it useful for this thesis.[82] The 'disneyfication' of engagements with Jewish themes can be seen as part of a wider post-communist phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe described by Ruth Ellen Gruber (2002) as 'virtual Jewishness': an interest of non-Jews in all "things Jewish" including culture, languages, heritage, in the absence of Jews.[83] The way that Lustig uses the term, however, allows to point out the specificity of the phenomenon, which is narrower than 'virtual Jewishness', because it highlights the absence of non-imagined Jews simultaneously to the presence of 'imagined Jews' in cultural products or events. 'Virtual Jewishness', on the other hand, includes a variety of elements appearing largely in the absence of Jews, but in some of them Jews may also be present, for example some of the Jewish Culture Festivals that Gruber (2002) talks about are created by and for both the local non-Jews and Jews.

In Łazy, the concert which accompanied *MoW*'s visit was promoted as "A concert of Jewish music", while the 'Jewishness' of performed pieces corresponded with first and foremost what Polish non-Jewish audience perceived as related to Jewish culture, such as the above-mentioned soundtrack from "Fiddler on the Roof". It attracted a few inhabitants and was considered by the local coordinator/activist a successful event. As mentioned, the concert featured pieces that were recognizable by a broad audience, so that it could attract as many people as possible. Sandra Lustig (2009, 83) explains that in 'disneyfication' perception is key:

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[82]'Disneyfication', also in the definition that Sandra Lustig proposes, refers to the economic process of commodification of certain ideas, services, goods. Using this term, therefore, is a way in which I connect memory with economic dynamics. According to Matthew J Allen, making this link more explicitly is required for understanding memory and for building the authority of memory studies as a field to "commenting and intervening upon pressing social issues" (2016, 372).

[83]The notable interest of non-Jews in virtual Jewishness includes plentiful festivals, concerts and workshops which are organized, it also means that Jewish heritage sites are restored and taken care of, often by non-Jews for non-Jews. More specifically, klezmer music celebrates commercial success all year long (Waligorska 2013; Ray 2010), former Jewish district, cemeteries, synagogues are restored, taken care of and promoted as tourist attractions (Kugelmass and Orla–Bukowska 1998; Lehrer 2013). After the opening of the Eastern bloc, it became possible for foreign institutions to support and finance these developments, but on the other hand the growth of heritage and Holocaust tourism contributed to the gentrification of some of the previously abandoned Jewish neighbourhoods and sites (Zubrzycki 2016a, 68).

> what is depicted and sold is not necessarily in fact Jewish (and of course, since Judaism has many traditions, there are many varieties of what is Jewish), but it may appear to an uninformed public to have something to do with Judaism (whether or not that is in fact the case). In such a situation, then, it is perceptions of Jews and Judaism which are marketed.

For POLIN's staff, and, as a consequence, for local activists working for *MoW*, the numbers of pavilion visitors or participants in local events were crucial to evaluating the success of the project, as I explained in Chapter Five. Engaging in the 'disneyfication' of Jewish culture thus became an attractive mode for ensuring high attendance. Well-known songs, jokes, poems or culinary dishes which appeared to be connected to Jewishness, appealed to wide local audiences. It was not about engaging with the complexity of Jewish culture and Polish/Jewish local heritage but rather about performing narratives of 'Jewishness' which were familiar to and expected by non-Jewish Poles. A preferred mode of engagement was, therefore, allosemitic tropes which contributed to maintaining a positive image of the community by avoiding challenging questions. Often, the speeches, songs, or poems were nostalgic about the past.

Following Svetlana Boym (2001, xiii), nostalgia:

> (from nostos – return home, and algia- longing) is a longing for a home that no longer exists or never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship.

In the case of local events accompanying *MoW,* nostalgia was articulated for a Jewish/Polish world of the past which many of the locals who organised and attended the events had never lived in. Nostalgia, then "recalls times and places that are no more or are out of reach" (Niemeyer 2014, 5). Time, history and progress are redefined in nostalgia, so having no private recollection of a period for which one feels nostalgia, is of little importance. "The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition" (Boym 2001, xv). The disneyfication (Lustig 2009) of the Jewish themes,

on one hand, provided a lens to (mis)perceive Jewishness and it served to define local collective memory about Jews in the absence of Jews. It also facilitated the marginalisation and cultural forgetting of the difficult elements of the Polish/Jewish past through nostalgia which can be seen as a factor of social amnesia (Niemeyer, 2014, 5).

Here, emphasising commonly recognised themes associated with Jewishness and Jewish culture in Poland could be seen as a way to avoid engaging with the difficult elements of the collective memory about Jewish absence. The engagement with these elements would include exploring how and why local populations behaved the way they did during the Holocaust, what happened to Jewish property after local Jews were murdered, or how Jews are remembered in local collective memory narratives. Yet, nostalgia was employed instead, and it concealed the complexity of the Polish/Jewish past.

The paradox of nostalgia that Svetlana Boym (2001, xv–xvii) articulately identifies, sheds light on why the disneyfication of Jewish culture and history can be problematic and overshadow the complexity of Polish/Jewish past and present:

> Nostalgia is paradoxical in the sense that longing can make us more empathetic toward fellow humans, yet the moment we try to repair longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways and put an end to mutual understanding. *Algia* – longing – is what we share, yet *nostos* – the return home – is what divides us. It is the promise to rebuild the ideal home that lies at the core of many powerful ideologies of today, tempting us to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding. The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one.

In relation to the local events accompanying *MoW* discussed here, the belonging that comes into the picture is the belonging to the local and national community, where the non-Jewish majority defines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. In this framework, Jews are subjects, not agents, and engaging with 'Jewish themes' is restricted by concerns for a positive self-perception of those who see themselves as community members. The inclusions and exclusions of Jews into and from local memoryscapes in rural Poland are discussed further in the next chapters. For now, it is important to highlight the connections between the

affective potential of nostalgia, belonging, and positive self-perception that might be unlocked by the local events running next to *MoW*.

In many of the 2015 artistic performances, culinary events as well as some of the guided walks and city games, nostalgia was employed to attract locals to engage with what they perceive as Jewish. Striving for high attendance by using nostalgia as a 'marketing strategy' was given prevalence over a reflection on difficult memory which is intrinsic to Polish/Jewish memoryscapes. Thus, if local organisers wanted to attract a broad audience to the local events, it was easier and 'safer' to focus on the nostalgic stories about the lost cultural and religious diversity of the community, which many of the potential audiences would expect. Employing these nostalgic tropes, however, did not advance critical approaches to the local past, but rather reproduced misconceptions and stereotypes. This shows that, as Katharina Niemeyer advocates, nostalgia is not only a phenomenon connected to popular culture and consumerism, but it has to be understood "in the larger critical context of historical, social, political and aesthetic considerations" (2014, 6).

6.3.3 Evolution of POLIN's approach

It is important to note, however, that POLIN's approach to local events and the support they offered to local activists changed from year to year and, when I spoke to some of the activists after 2015, POLIN's staff grew critical of the nostalgic or allosemitic modes of depicting the Jews in some of the events. In an interview conducted in March 2017, a POLIN employee working on *MoW* told me that in her team at the museum, an often-discussed topic was how to monitor the content of accompanying events. She gave the example of guided walks to explain how POLIN is identifying problems with local events and how they seek to rectify them:

> For example, walks, walks are to be done when *Museum on Wheels* is closed or at times when one of the educators could go for such a walk. And then the local historian could indeed guide people to places of also memory, and the educator could talk about the culture. Because this certainly often does not work well. Maybe not often, but it happens

> that it does not work well. Simply those local historians have immense knowledge about localness, but it completely does not translate into general aspects related to precisely Jewish culture. Or history in general. Some mistakes slip in here and there, and they stay in people's heads afterwards. So indeed, we are trying to find some good solutions, but not general ones. Only to specific local activities, which... often educators meet with local coordinators and they talk about what is going to happen. For example they [the educators] sensitise [local coordinators] to particular aspects. (*MoW* coordinator, Female, Warsaw 13.3.2017)

As I mentioned in the Preface, educators' primary role was to welcome visitors to the pavilion, introduce them to what is presented there and talk about POLIN Museum's work as well as conduct workshops from POLIN's offer in each town. Usually, one of the two educators in each town was an employee of POLIN in Warsaw: as a guide at the permanent exhibition or an educator in the museum's education department. The second person, or sometimes both, was, or were, selected from external candidates in an open call for applications announced a few months before the tour started each year.[84]

Educators had extensive subject-related knowledge and experience and thus, as indicated by the *MoW*'s coordinator, they could contribute to identifying issues with local events and proposing ways to amend them. Yet, attracting a substantial audience remained instrumental in POLIN's approach to *MoW*: the numbers of visitors, participants, attendees were treated as indicators of the travelling project's success. Much depended on local coordinators, whether they were willing and able to propose local events which would provoke difficult and challenging engagements with local Polish/Jewish memory. In the 2015 tour, the in-depth engagements with Polish/Jewish pasts were in many local events compromised for the disneyfied performances and narratives which depicted familiar and expected Jewishness, an example of which I analysed in the previous section.

This helped to attract local audiences to attend events, but whether it also helped in provoking further exploration of Polish/Jewish past, which might bring up challenging

[84]What was considered in the selection process was the applicants' education, knowledge of Jewish history and culture in Poland, experience in working with groups or on project similar to *MoW*.

questions related to local history, family and individual's position in the memoryscape, is a different issue.[85] What is important to emphasise here, however, is that many questions arise regarding local events and how these should and could facilitate the process of dealing with difficult memory about Jewish/Polish past on the vernacular level. To consider this question further, the following sub-section discusses the visit of *MoW* in another town in 2015, Koźminek. Analysis of *MoW*'s intervention in Koźminek highlights the significance of the role of local activists, and so is connected to Chapter Five. In doing so, it also demonstrates that there is a potential for different ways of approaching local preoccupations with Jewish absence than those already described on the example of Łazy.

6.3.4 Koźminek: posing challenging questions

In Koźminek, there were two local activists who became *MoW* coordinators and together ran four accompanying events: a 'happening' (a pop-up event which included local children walking around the central places of the town and handing to passers-by little pieces of paper with names of Jewish children who used to live in the town), a klezmer music concert, a scavenger hunt, and a premiere film screening of a documentary made by one of the coordinators with her husband: *Koźminek – historia nieznana. Żydzi* (Koźminek – the unknown history. The Jews). They also prepared an exhibition featuring pictures with pieces of matzevot, translating and explaining the inscriptions from the local Jewish cemetery. The cemetery was demolished a few decades earlier and currently there is a warehouse built on its territory (I explore the position of this cemetery in the local memoryscape in Chapter Seven). As in Łazy, the pavilion was located in the central place in the town, which here was the

[85]Sandra Lustig (2009, 85) writes: "one might argue that even the 'Jewish Disneyland' approach offers the broader public opportunities to become more interested in Jewish themes, and that it can thus contribute to mutual understanding between Jews and non-Jews. If the goal is to be achieved, however, then the content of what is presented to the general public as Jewish must be factual, and not be based on biased or even stereotypical or anti-Semitic perceptions." A follow-up question related to the connection between 'Jewish Disneyland' and factual content could be asked as follows: can an encounter with disneyfied Jewish culture motivate the audience to engage further with exploring the difficulties of Polish/Jewish memory? *Museum on Wheels'* agenda seems to suggest that it can.

market square. Local coordinators thought that the visit of *MoW* created an unprecedented opportunity to address the complexity of local history and to begin a public discussion on how Koźminek's demography changed in a few decades (Interviewee S, Female, 26.05.2015, Koźminek; Interviewee J, Female, 26.05.2015, Koźminek).[86]

The events accompanying *MoW* organized by the two local coordinators were highly visible in the public space, they attracted many locals (the concert attracted a few tens of people and the film screening more than 150) and provoked many conversations about the past among inhabitants (Interviewee J, Female, Koźminek, 26.05.2015). It was especially the premiere screening of *Koźminek – historia nieznana (...)* which inspired discussions about local past. In this documentary film with feature elements and oral history accounts, both Jews and non-Jews of the town who remember the Holocaust were interviewed. The film does not neglect antisemitism or hostility towards Jews demonstrated at various points in the past in Koźminek but engages with them. For example, it tells a story of Szlamek Bruks who came back to Koźminek with his father after the Holocaust, and reclaimed their house, only to be forced to leave again under threats to their safety. The film also includes accounts of the destruction of the Jewish cemetery after the Holocaust by non-Jewish Poles.

In contrast to the presentation of oral history material gathered by the local activist in Łazy, in Koźminek the material shown in the film was skilfully edited and contextualised. For example, it included a commentary from Jolanta Kulpińska, Professor of Sociology at the University of Łódź, who described pre-Holocaust relations between Jews and non-Jews in the area. In Łazy this sort of explanation was lacking and the primary sources, oral history interviews in this case, were shown without a critical historical framework to help the audience understand the allosemitism and inequality which underlay the prevalent narratives

[86]Apart from the events they designed, the two also chose to have a screening of *Ida* by Paweł Pawlikowski and the evening of games from the offer proposed by the POLIN Museum. Then, the additional exhibition "They risked their lives (...)" was shown in the local library and two workshops for children were led by POLIN's educators: "Let's build a shtetl" was done with a group of 6-7-year olds, and "Beit Yehudi – Jewish house through centuries" was run for 10-12-year olds.

on the Jewish past in Poland. Providing tools and knowledge to critically evaluate tropes about otherness and allosemitism, in order to contribute to a more open, tolerant and inclusive society, is one of the overall goals of POLIN Museum and *Museum on Wheels*. The activist in Łazy who presented gathered materials certainly had good intentions: to showcase the resources she collected which could then be further used to engage with and understand stories about local past. Yet, despite her good intentions, presenting the materials she had gathered without any critical commentary might have brought the opposite effect to that intended for *MoW*'s locally-run events. Namely, it could have rather strengthened, confirmed or taught the audiences of this presentation about allosemitic depictions of Jews.

Figure 10: Local accompanying event in Koźminek, May 2015. It was a 'happening' where young people distributed cards with names of Jews living in the town in 1920s and 1930s, taken from a school register. Photo taken by POLIN's staff. Used with the permission of the museum.

In Koźminek, on the other hand, local activists seemed to be willing to invest time and effort to transform the ephemeral engagements with difficult memory about Jews on the vernacular level into a more long-term process. It seemed that they sought to encourage further interest and to explore ideas for local engagement in a mode which questions "what we are now (and, perhaps more significantly), how we might be in the future" (Bonell and

Simon 2007, 81). Although they were among the few people in the town who actively sought to address, and eventually commemorate and include into memoryscape, the lost cultural and religious diversity of pre-Holocaust Koźminek, it was clear during the visit of *MoW* that working together was crucial for them. In other words, the individuals who seemed committed to exploring the complexity of Polish/Jewish, but also Evangelical and German, past of Koźminek, had already gathered a small group of people with various skills who supported and motivated one another to make the film, invite *Museum on Wheels,* and continue along these lines once *MoW* had left with further steps after. The local activists/coordinators built on and expanded the resources and network already available to them locally to inspire critical engagements with collective memory on the vernacular level.

In Łazy the situation was different: the activist who invited *MoW* was for most part working alone. Although she had support from people in the public institution where she worked to organize the project, and she received some help from another local, a man younger than her, who helped in creating the oral history collection, and finally, she worked with the scouts group to organise one of the local accompanying events; it seemed like she was the one who put most time and effort into the process. Altogether she was rather isolated, and struggled to secure enough support, help and motivation from people in the area who would share her passion and interest for exploring the local past. She lacked a network of people who could together with her invest their time and efforts into engaging with the difficult Polish/Jewish past and transform it into a process of questioning how the past is remembered and what this means for the present and the future of the local community. Furthermore, as I mentioned, she had insufficient knowledge and expertise on the topic.

Thus, coming back to the general argument of this chapter: *MoW*'s focus on the ephemerality of interventions, and the resultant, short-term, task-oriented support offered to local activists, meant that the long-term goals and expectations that many local activists had

related to Jewish/Polish past remained of secondary importance in the collaborative process. POLIN contributed to a step in the process of developing interest in and knowledge about Jews locally, but how this short-term intervention could contribute to the long-term developments of creating a more inclusive understanding of local past, where difficult memory is acknowledged, depended on local activists and the networks and resources they had built and accumulated prior to *MoW*'s visit.

6.4 Conclusions

Both in Koźminek and in Łazy the absence of Jews and loss of the cultural and religious diversity within the local population were key tropes in locally-organised events. Visitors of the *MoW* pavilion and participants of the events, by watching, listening, talking or joining an activity such as a city game, engaged in the exploration of the Jewish/Polish memoryscape of the present. In the accompanying events run locally during *MoW*'s visits, one of the ways in which the loss of the Jewish community was approached was through nostalgia for an idealised Polish/Jewish past in concerts or artistic performances. Svetlana Boym concludes one of the chapters in her book with a reflection on the 'restoration work' performed by a bar in Ljubljana, which sought to evoke nostalgia to former Yugoslavia: "it makes no pretence of depth commemoration and offers only a transient urban adventure with excellent pastries and other screen memories. As for the labour of grief, it could take a lifetime to complete" (2001, 55). As for dealing with difficult Polish/Jewish memory in the small towns of rural Poland, *Museum on Wheels* had been created, among other things, to support the process of engaging with the complexity of this memory. The free gadgets, tastings, artistic performances and guided walks offered during *MoW*'s visits were expected to encourage locals to explore the complexities of the local Polish/Jewish memoryscapes.

Questioning the exclusions and misconceptions in collective memory narratives on the vernacular level in the framework of *MoW* required the collaborative effort of people in

the town and of museum's staff. I demonstrated in this chapter that the needs of local activists, and the local communities they were working for, were related to addressing a preoccupation with Jewish absence – whether this was articulated by covering it up or attempting to critically engaging with it. Yet, POLIN did not address these needs explicitly, because for the museum the central story emphasised in *MoW* was similar to what is communicated in Warsaw through the permanent exhibition: the focus was on continuity, Jewish presence in Poland over the centuries, culture and traditions.

CHAPTER SEVEN Exploring vernacular level of collective memory through locals' stories

In collaborative museum-making, it is not only the curators, educators and managers who influence how visitors engage with projects. It is also the visitors themselves, with their identities, backgrounds, and interests who contribute to the museum. As explained in Chapter Three, I see reception not as a passive process, but as an active interaction which is productive (Hall 1973, 1980; Morley 1993): it contributed to what *MoW* was and which stories it evoked. *Museum on Wheels,* and the memory about Jewish/Polish past which it elicited, was shaped in a collaborative process in which visitors, local activists, other local actors as well as museum's staff were involved.

In this chapter, I offer an insight into how productive reception contributed to this process by analysing visitors' stories. On the basis of a data sample from interviews I conducted in 2015 and 2016, it was revealed that POLIN misunderstood the needs of visitors to engage with Jewish absence and the Holocaust (Kubica and Van de Putte 2019). The quantitative analysis of 27 interviews showed that in 68.22 percent the interviewees who I talked to in their responses to my questions focused on the preoccupation with Jewish absence,[87] even if in 78 percent of my questions they were prompted to talk about the Museum's narrative (Kubica and Van de Putte 2019, 9). Following from that, through a close reading of selected inhabitants' stories, I show how the preoccupation with Jewish absence, which remained in tension with POLIN's focus on the story of continuity, shaped the collaborative museum-making of *MoW*.

[87]The interviews that were analysed included all the interviews conducted with visitors of *MoW* in Koźminek, Namysłów, Pińczów, Przeworsk and Żarki – thus almost all the towns that are closely examined in this thesis (only data from Łazy was not considered in the sample). In the article, quantitative lexicometric and qualitative content analytical methods were used to examine how visitors engage with the discourse of POLIN.

In this chapter, using encounters with two interviewees in 2015, I show how the awareness of Jewish absence, as well as allosemitic and nostalgic tropes, provided a vocabulary with which to negotiate the inclusion and exclusion of Jews into and from rural memoryscapes in Poland. At the same time, I demonstrate how evoking such tropes was a way to define speakers' belonging to the communities in which they lived. The allosemitic and nostalgic tropes that I explore in this chapter were also prevalent in some of the accompanying events run during the *MoW*'s visits in 2015, as I show in the previous chapter. Here, because in one of the interviews analysed a Jewish cemetery was a key site mentioned, I also discuss how Jewish cemeteries in Poland contribute to the preoccupation with Jewish absence, and I show an example of how they can be used in the negotiations of belonging.

I analyse vernacular collective memory on an individual level by focusing on stories told during *Museum on Wheels'* interventions into rural memoryscapes. As I explained in Chapter Three, the individuals' accounts of the past are constructed from one's personal experiences, stories about experiences of others and narratives prevailing in the public and private sphere. Studying memory on the collective level means investigating "the processes by which memory exists relationally and through social interactions, evolving through continual and reciprocal dialogue between social individuals" (Gensburger 2016, 404). This chapter contributes to understanding the processes of collective memory on individual and interpersonal levels by analysing interactions that take place in particular situational and cultural contexts. By exploring how individuals interact with one another in the context of *Museum on Wheels,* this chapter uncovers the constantly active and evolving construction of memoryscapes in rural Poland. Finally, as it focuses on stories, it reveals how the activity of storytelling, because of its inherent dependence on the individual as much as his/her relations with others, can contribute to creating agency.

7.2 Storytelling as a reflexive practice

Stories and storytelling practices are of particular interest to me in this chapter, as "it is through our stories that we construct ourselves as part of our world" (Brockmeier and Harre 2001, 54). Yet, even though narrative activity enables individuals to contemplate events, thoughts and emotions, this opportunity can be unevenly distributed and some members of a community may be granted more reflexive rights than others (Ochs 2011, 80). To become a storyteller, one first needs to be the audience; and the reflexivity of the storyteller "makes it possible for her or him to shift from audience to storyteller and storyteller to audience, to shift consciousness to experience and experience to consciousness" (Langellier and Peterson 2004, 3). Thus, reflexivity and reflexive rights are key in storytelling interactions. Because of its reflexivity, "any particular storytelling event has the potential to disrupt material constraints and discourse conventions and to give rise to new possibilities for other storytelling events and for how we participate in performing narrative" (ibid., 4). This chapter explores how, through storytelling, in the context of *MoW*'s visits, individuals narrated collective memory about Jews on the vernacular level and negotiated their positions in the community. The affective elements of a storytelling situation as an interaction are considered together with its contexts, of culture and of situation.

Stories, apart from involving characters and a plot which develops over time, confer to specific cultural conventions in recounting events that are considered noteworthy by the teller (Brockmeier and Harre 2001, 41). Because stories concern the unusual and unexpected, "they also serve to articulate and sustain common understandings of what a culture deems ordinary" (Ochs 2011, 72). To situate the unusual in relation to the ordinary, the storytellers usually seek to make a point, and this impacts how the narrative is constructed (Ochs 2011, 71). Narrative, in this case, is the form in which events are reported, it is "a special repertoire of instructions and norms of what is to be done and not to be done in life and how an

individual case is to be integrated into a generalized and culturally established canon." (Brockmeier and Harre 2001, 51). Narrative can be seen as "*modus operandi* of specific discursive practices", and thus in studying it one needs to consider not only these practices, but also their cultural texts and contexts (Brockmeier and Harre 2001, 53).

'Context' however, in relation to recounting stories, is an ambiguous term, and Ben-Amos' (1993) distinction between 'context of culture' and 'context of situation' provides a useful tool for the analysis of storytelling interactions. Ben-Amos identifies context of culture as the widest contextual frame, "the reference to, and the representation of, the shared knowledge of speakers, their conventions, conduct, belief systems, language metaphors and speech genres, their historical awareness, and ethical and judicial principles" (1993, 215–16). On the other hand, the context of situation is the most direct frame, and it includes everything that is local, such as the age, status and gender of speakers and listeners, code, style, intonation, dramatization, time and place of the storytelling interaction. Within the context of situation, then, there is "a correlation between the semantic values of its various components" (Ben-Amos 1993, 218). In this chapter a study of the stories recounted by individuals is situated in the framework of *MoW*'s stories and of local accounts about the past, as well as cultural events accompanying the intervention. All these can be interpreted as cultural texts which contribute to the context of culture, but they can also play the role of contexts of specific storytelling situations. In the analysis that follows, I pay attention to both contexts described here to understand how the stories I chose are positioned within the local memoryscapes and in the broader context of collective memory about Jews in Poland.

7.3 Jewish absence and allosemitism in Koźminek

In Koźminek, and many other small towns in Poland in the narratives about the past of the local government or tourist information, the absence of a Jewish community is acknowledged, for instance, through numbers or percentages of Jews who lived in the town

before WW2 and the Holocaust, and through explaining that local Jews were deported and murdered (see for instance: Gmina Kozminek n.d.). This acknowledgement is also part of wider socialization narratives in the cultural context in Poland: through media, literature, cultural productions, etc. - for instance those I described in Chapter Two. This does not inevitably mean, however, that former Jewish inhabitants are included in the accounts of the past in Poland.

MoW's ephemeral visits created opportunities for publicly addressing the absence of Jews. In the case of Koźminek the visit granted agency to the Jewish community formerly inhabiting the town by naming its members, with families sharing stories that encouraged a critical examination of how Jews are depicted in the collective memory narratives on vernacular level. In Koźminek, one of the local events, a premiere screening of a documentary film *Koźminek - historia nieznana (...),* which I mentioned in the previous chapter, was particularly crucial in stimulating the conversations about local Jews who used to inhabit the town and about how these Jews are, or are not, remembered.[88] The screening of the film and the stories included in and excluded from the film were vividly discussed by inhabitants with POLIN's employees, including myself. In an interview with a male inhabitant, excerpts of which I analyse below, there are numerous references made to this film. Yet, although I suggest here that local events like the screening of the film may provoke critical examinations of how Jews are (mis)represented or why they are neglected in local memoryscapes, the analysis of this interviewee's stories shows that it might also encourage mobilisations of allosemitic tropes in order to uphold a positive image of the person and the local community.

[88]The documentary was produced and directed by one of the local coordinators, a primary school history teacher, together with her husband, a photographer. The work on the documentary, which included elements of a feature film, archival footage and oral history interviews, started in 2014 and the filmmakers rushed to finish editing by May 2015, so they would be able to show the film during *Museum on Wheels'* visit.

7.3.1 "there were beautiful pine trees there"

The interview was conducted on the main square of the village, next to the *Museum on Wheels* pavilion. At the time of the interview a concert of klezmer music was taking place on the other side of the square. The interviewee came with his wife to see the concert, but while she was sitting closer to the performing musicians and dancers, the husband came up to the pavilion and this is where I approached him after he looked around in the pavilion. It is notable how the interviewee (teller, narrator) identified himself. He was informed that the interview concerns *Museum on Wheels,* the local past, and Jewish heritage, and when I asked him: "how did you find yourself here at this exhibition?" he began by validating his position: he presented himself as someone who has something meaningful to contribute to the study. He mentioned his age (60 years old) and connection to the community since birth, he also added that he remembers some of the buildings which used to belong to the Jewish community. This served as a preface to the story which he then recounted: it is a story of which he is the protagonist, but this only becomes clear at the very end. The destruction of the Jewish cemetery is the setting for revealing the central event of the story, which was the teller's participation in the defamation of the burial grounds when he was a child.

> We used to go there, to this cemetery, and after all these Wies (?) warehouses are built on this. You know, there was a very beautiful heap of sand, there were beautiful pine trees there, these dwarf ones, spreading, and now I won't tell you exactly in which year... but at some point in 1967, most likely when they were building the Kaliniec district in Kalisz. This new district. Here in Kozminek lives this guy, he stayed overnight in *hansbuda* (?), a digger came on Star66, dumpers, and in a few, in a few days, you know, they took everything away completely. There was this beautiful sand there, it was suitable for directly pargeting, you don't even have to sift it. and there were skulls, there was all that... and they took, you know, all that, for those... and we were these small boys, I was maybe 11, maybe 12 years old then. And you know, I was stupid... so we were throwing up the skulls and kicked them with our feet <Researcher: mhm...>, because you know, when one is young and stupid, right? So this is what I can tell you. (Interviewee A, Male, Koźminek, 24.05.2015)

The teller first tries to present himself in the best light as protagonist, like in detective stories, using 'slow disclosure' where relevant information appears gradually (Ochs, Smith,

and Taylor 1989, 243). The nostalgic comment on how the grounds of the cemetery, which he considers picturesque and beautiful, were hastily and violently destroyed by the machines which arrived from elsewhere is yet another element of constructing the setting in a suggestive way so that his actions would "seem reasonable and worthy of interlocutor's empathy" (Ochs 2011, 74). The revelation of the key event which "disrupts the equilibrium of ordinary, expected circumstances" (Ochs 2011, 75), comes with a direct moral evaluation of the protagonist's action. The evaluation is repeated twice "I was stupid" and "one was stupid". Then follows the moment of silence and an expectation for a confirmation or encouragement from the listener, and after the revelation of the key event, the evaluation is made in the third person; in this way the teller distances himself from the young boy who he once was, and then signals with the coda "so this is what I can tell you" that he finished his story.

Through this storytelling interaction, he seems to seek to define his connection to the community. He also makes the link between the narratives about former Jewish inhabitants and the Jewish cemetery as a localised material site. Through the story, the interviewee indicates his connection to the place: the childhood memories he shares are to indicate his belonging to the local community and depict him as a member of a larger group. It was not that he by himself went to the Jewish cemetery and played with the skulls, but it was a group activity he had done with his peers, and the collective dimension of this is vital for negotiating his belonging. Some of the elements and themes present in this story resonate with other data gathered in rural Poland. Particularly, such nostalgic tropes were a recurring theme in the context of *MoW,* as I explained in Chapter Six. As such, the ways in which exclusions are narrated in this story, of Jews and the individuals behind the institutions of the communist regime, is another exemplary element identifiable in interactions occurring during *MoW*'s visits. Performance of these and other exclusions is even more significant in the part

of the interview that follows, where I asked the teller further questions related to the story he recounted. Additionally, the analysis of the second excerpt allows to reflect on the broader context of culture in which the storytelling took place.

7.3.2 "you know, they needed the sand"

With a follow-up question: "Nobody here talked about this or opposed it somehow?", I sought to invite a further story about the period when the cemetery was destroyed, but the interviewee's response focused on the recent past. He mentions that even if people knew about it, they would rather not speak up, and then moves on to talk about ideas for building a museum there, as well as gatherings that were organised to discuss the topic, which he said he had wanted to attend but was unable to. When he found out about *MoW* coming, he welcomed the idea, hoping that it would offer him the opportunity to talk about what he remembers. He finishes this response by saying: "If I was 20 years older, I would have been able to tell you even more. But like this I cannot tell you anything." To next question: "but was it so... do you think that someone from the municipality decided this, or...?" he reacts as follows:

> Interviewee: well, you know... this was during communism, so you know, various things happened. I do not suspect that someone from Koźminek did this. <Researcher: mhm..>. Maybe from above, from Kalisz, or such... you know, they needed sand. Well a little bit, from here Kozminek the inhabitants, there from the surroundings, came up to there with a vehicle and took away a bit, in the past they used to build like this, right... <R: mhm..> so you know, a little bit of this sand they took. So a small bit, a small bit...
> Researcher: Why was this sand so good?
> Interviewee: seemingly you know there was some sediment, some... some hill, that they, the Jews, had found this place suitable and that is where they buried themselves. I tell you, they levelled it with the ground, devastated everything to the ground and they put these warehouses up, right. (Interviewee A, Male, Koźminek, 24.05.2015)

The moral evaluation and relativisation the interviewee offers are significant for distinguishing between the actors from the outside of the community, who were responsible for the destruction of the cemetery, and those from Koźminek, who stole the sand to use it for their own construction works, again, defining belonging to the local community. The ones

responsible for the destruction are “from above”, possibly from Kalisz, they are not named directly but identified deictically as ‘they’. The interviewee assumes from the context of the situation (communicating in Polish language, knowledge about interviewer’s job and background) that I can decipher the reference the teller makes to ‘the communists’. The communist government and the individuals behind the institutions of the communist regime are commonly depicted through an antagonistic relationship with society in public discourses in Poland (Chmielewska 2013).

By talking about ‘them’ and ‘locals’ as two opposite sides, the interviewee makes the distinction between the morally acceptable behaviour of those who are included in his community, and whose motivations for stealing the sand he understands and supports, and those of the other side, who are the distant, condemned employees of the governmental machine, who bear the responsibility for the abrupt and violent destruction of the cemetery site with heavy machinery. The unnamed governmental employees are the ones to whom he assigns responsibility for destroying the cemetery site, while the inhabitants, even if they were involved in destroying it as well, are the principal protagonists responsible for upholding the memory about the existence of this cemetery in collective memory narratives on vernacular level and potentially in the form of a memorial or a museum that he mentions.

Additionally, the interviewee narrativizes his own exclusion from the storytelling practices of the community and the public discussions on the material memoryscape of Koźminek. He was not asked to contribute with his story to the documentary film and it is likely that he perceives participating in the interview as a chance to recount a story of his personal experience and articulate his connection to the local community, showing that he belongs, as the analysis of the excerpt in the previous section demonstrates. Being asked additional questions he repeats the apology for his age and consequentially for not being able to tell more “if I was 20 years older, I would have been able to tell you even more”. Yet, he

believes there is some value in what he does tell, which is demonstrated by the usage of the adverb 'even more'. In recounting the public discussions held in the past on commemorating the cemetery, he also performs an apology and excuses himself: "I did not have time and did not go to this, because I would have said something, right, related to this cemetery".

In answer to the question on resistance towards the destruction of the cemetery, he responds with what he assumes is expected of him: an expression of support and interest for commemorating the Jewish heritage of the village. This can be interpreted as a response to the context of the situation, an interaction with me where I presented myself as particularly interested in local Jewish heritage, and the setting in which this interaction happens: at the market square which is 'taken over' by *Museum on Wheels* and its accompanying events on a Sunday afternoon. On the other hand, the interviewee's approach is situated in a broader cultural context: locally, it is the mobilisation of neglected memories about Jews in the public sphere in Koźminek by the intervention of *Museum on Wheels*, but also by the production of the documentary and the oral history interviews project conducted in the village 2014. More broadly, on the national level, the cultural context includes the emergence of Jewish/Polish past as a topic discussed in education, cultural productions, museums, governmental and non-governmental community projects.

Finally, the exclusion, and absence of Jews from the Koźminek's memoryscape is related to an allosemitic process of othering. For the interviewee, defining himself as a local who cares about Jewish heritage, here a cemetery, is not connected, paradoxically, to a willingness to include Jews into the local memoryscape and explore difficult narratives about the Polish/Jewish past. Rather, it is a way to define his belonging to the local community both in the past, and in the present. In his story Jews are depicted as 'others', they are instrumentalised in order to show that the narrator belongs to the community.

The interviewee from Koźminek appeared to be upset by the destruction of the Jewish cemetery in the 1960s, not because of respect or empathy he felt towards members of the Jewish community formerly inhabiting the village, but because he had fond personal recollections of the beauty of the place where the cemetery was located, and it was connected to his childhood and playing with his friends. At the end of the quotation it is made clear that the Jews are an exoticized other for the interviewee: in his account, the location of the Jewish cemetery had some special, magical value which remains incomprehensible and inaccessible to him as a non-Jew. He constructed Jews using an allosemitic lens by concentrating on upholding the positive image of himself and of the community, focusing on defining belonging for the non-Jewish (Catholic) Poles. This included depicting Jews as 'others', denying them the right to be included into the local memoryscape, and in this way creating a distance which facilitated justifying any harmful or detrimental actions by locals towards the material remnants related to the former Jewish presence in the town.

Perceiving the Jewish cemetery as a site governed by magic and supernatural powers, as the interviewee seems to do, is a common trope found by Alina Cała (1995) in folklore accounts about Jews. Joanna Krakowska writes that "Jewish mythologies and Polish folklore imaginaries about Jewish cemeteries reinforce the thinking about the space of the cemetery as a place which is 'different from other places', reversing and contesting their order (…)" (2017, 107). What further highlights the exclusion of Jews from local memoryscapes, related to an ignorance and lack of sensitivity towards other religions or customs, is the disregard of the role of cemetery in Jewish traditions by those who defamed, destroyed or built over Jewish cemeteries all over Poland. In Jewish traditions, the cemetery is considered as a safe space, "inviolable, stable space of rest of the dead, but also with all the objects which are located on it, which are the property of the dead" (Mroczkowska 2016, 44). The Holocaust transformed the actual space of the cemeteries "by its destruction, by breaching rituals

connected to it (among others the rule of inviolability of the body and inviolability of the grave), and above all by irrevocable annihilation of it as a 'space of life' – into a symbolic space" (Krakowska 2017, 107).[89]

Although exploring in depth the position of the material remnants of former Jewish presence in rural Poland remains outside of the scope of this thesis, below I briefly explore how cemeteries are situated within Polish/Jewish memoryscapes because this local environment is also a crucial part collaborative museum making. Jewish cemeteries as material sites are one of the key elements of local memoryscapes which contribute to the preoccupation with Jewish absence, and in most places visited by *MoW,* Jewish cemeteries were one of the main sites included in local interactive maps, visitor conversations while in the pavilion, and guided walks in the town or village.

7.4 Jewish cemeteries as symbolic spaces

Today, in the early 21st century, there are very few Jewish cemeteries preserved in good condition in Poland. Out of 1300 existing Jewish cemeteries in present-day Poland, only less than half can be identified as such through any material traces (Mroczkowska 2016, 45). Many of the Jewish cemeteries were destroyed and used for other purposes during the Nazi occupation, by the Nazis and/or local population, and some in the communist period in 1950s and 1960s, with consent of the government at the time (Mroczkowska 2016, 45), as for example the one in Koźminek that the interviewee talked about. Yet, the material defamation and destruction of the cemeteries does not mean that these cemeteries disappeared. In classical Jewish law "a cemetery is considered a consecrated, eternal resting place for those who are buried there, a place that must be maintained out of respect for the dead" (Webber

[89]The connection between cemetery and life in Judaism is articulated on the semantic level: in Hebrew one of the terms for cemetery is *beit chaim*, "the house of life", the other ones are *beit olam* "the house of eternity" or *beit kwarot* "house of graves" (Mroczkowska 2016, 43). In Polish *cmentarz* 'cemetery', comes from Latin *coemeterium* "a place of rest" (PWN n.d.). Yet, interestingly, in folklore etymology cmentarz is rooted in the word *smętek*/*smutek* so sadness. Original meaning of *cmentarz* would then be "a place where people are being upset" (PWN n.d.; Malinowski 2009).

2015, 239) even if it is not fenced and there are no tombstones there anymore. The destruction of these cemeteries is also an element of collaboratively-created social amnesia and exclusion of Jews from the local community. The destruction of the material sites is explained in various ways, as the example from Koźminek demonstrated, or neglected in the vernacular stories.

Cemeteries mark "death's role in the community's continuity, drawing the mourned and memorialized into an arc of tradition (...) (Blanchot 10)" (Listoe 2006, 52). Demolishing a Jewish cemetery, then, is not only a material act of destruction, but it also signifies excluding local Jewish communities, as agents whose burial traditions are to be respected, from the local memoryscape. Using matzevot as building material elsewhere is an element of this exclusion: during the Nazi occupation and during the communist period the tombstones were used "for fortifying roads or in building bridges by the German army, as well as used by local communities as building material" (Mroczkowska 2016, 45).[90] Matzevah is a synecdoche of a Jewish cemetery "as a piece which indicates and authenticates the whole – but also as a visible materiality of the cemetery, in contrast with the invisible materiality of the remains, the identity of which it authenticates" (Krakowska 2017, 126). At the same time, matzevot can be interpreted as "synecdoches of Jewish possessions, which were plundered and appropriated, but which, differently from most of other property, did not lose its Jewish cue" (ibid.). Some of the matvezot were recently returned to the sites of Jewish cemeteries, collected in local museums, or other public spaces to be used for lapidaries, monuments or other forms of commemoration of the former Jewish presence in the town or village. Many were not. While conducting fieldwork in 2015 and 2016, I saw and heard of many examples of where pieces of matzevot can be found in fences, stairs, church floors, wells.

[90]Łukasz Baksik documented various usages of the matzevot in villages, towns and cities all over Poland in his exhibitions and book *Macewy codziennego użytku* ("Matzevot for everyday use") (2008-2013).

The destroying, plundering, appropriating and use of the matzevot and cemetery sites by Nazis, and, later, local non-Jewish populations, is an exclusion of Jews from the memoryscape through the erasure of material traces of local Jewish communities. It required and requires a deliberate effort to ignore and obliterate the former Jewish presence and to collaborate in social amnesia. This exclusion by attempts to erase traces is inseparable from the Holocaust, the event which transformed the key meaning of the Jewish cemeteries into a symbolic one (Krakowska 2017, 107). The recent efforts in many villages, towns and cities to recover the matzevot, return them to the cemeteries, reconstruct the cemeteries "are activities located in the symbolic order", Krakowska observes. They take place

> in isolation from materiality of the remnants, from practices of Judaism, from the reflection of the rule of nonviolation of the graves which has been violated long ago – these activities are not part of the cultural practices related to death and burial, but to the practices of commemoration. (Krakowska 2017, 130)

The symbolic practices of commemoration seek to revert collaborative forgetting and strive towards bringing back and including Jews into the local memoryscapes, comprising Jewish heritage in material form as well as in collective memory narratives on the vernacular level. Yet, even when some form of commemoration takes place, for instance by restoring sites of Jewish heritage and including stories about Jews into accounts of local past, inclusion and exclusion remain negotiated in the everyday, as the following example from Żarki demonstrates.

In many places, like in Koźminek, these negotiations about inclusion and exclusion include not only the Jewish cemetery and other buildings belonging to the Jewish community and individual Jewish inhabitants, but also the cemetery and other buildings which belonged to the Evangelical community or its members who lived in the town until the end of WW2. The visit of *MoW* contributed to advancing the discussions about how to take care of the neglected heritage of the former inhabitants of Koźminek by providing an ephemeral space not only for local activists, but locals in general, to negotiate inclusion and exclusion through

telling stories: to educators, coordinators, me, but also each other. The story from Koźminek analysed above offered an example of how allosemitism and nostalgia provided the vocabulary to talk about belonging of individuals to the local community and to negotiate the inclusion or exclusion of Jews into or from the local memoryscape. The second example selected, from Żarki, illustrates a different way in which nostalgia was used by a visitor of *MoW* in negotiating belonging to the local community and the inclusion of Jews into the memoryscape.

7.5 Promoting Jewish heritage in Żarki

For the local activists who invited *MoW* to Żarki, the visit of POLIN's project was yet another initiative fitting well into the town's overall strategy and activities related to the Jewish heritage. The picture painted by local activists during interviews suggests that the local memoryscape firmly includes the appreciation of the centuries-long Jewish presence in Żarki (Interviewee I, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015; Interviewee W, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015). In contrast, the interactions between POLIN's employees, including myself at the time, and the local community, demonstrated how memoryscapes, and the ways in which Jews are part of them, were constantly being negotiated in the individuals' narrative activity.

The interview selected for analysis below was conducted with a woman (65 years old) whose personal connection and affective reactions were an exception among the interviews conducted in this particular town. Other local visitors and organisers that I interacted with seemed to have a more abstract, less personal connection with the Jewish/Polish past of their town. The material remnants such as the restored and repurposed synagogue and Jewish cemeteries appeared more significant than stories about former Jewish inhabitants. It was the opposite in the case of the interviewee whose stories are examined in the following section. The embodied elements, such as stories, were more crucial for her than the material sites.

7.5.1 "almost every day I live the history"

The interview was conducted in front of the *Museum on Wheels* pavilion, after the woman carefully familiarized herself with the exhibition. One of the questions I asked her, after she had declared she was very interested in local history, was to clarify what exactly she was interested in. This triggered the interviewee (teller, narrator) to tell a story of her interest in local past and repeating what I asked: "why am I interested?" served as a preface to the story she went on to tell. Her first reaction was: "because for generations back my ancestors lived here". She continued with a longer explanation:

> Apart from that I live currently in the present time like all of us, at the same time, I suppose like not many people, well almost every day I live the history. A lot, a lot. This means while walking along the streets in a way I see the inhabitants who had been here, walked on these roads, streets, those who lived in these houses... well, and this is why what is missing for me in this exhibition, what I would expect but I know that this is impossible, because it is in a way another kind of exhibition, I think that some sort of family roots made me approach history in that way. As I say, for generations back my ancestors lived here. My grandfather was here for 20 years a local governor of the Żarki municipality for the whole, in the interwar period. So that actually from the family stories I have a lot of this information. (Interviewee B, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015)

The teller first defines her connection and interest in the past as very personal, but at the same time related to the position of her family in the community. The key event of the story is the challenging encounter, the juxtaposition which occurs that in the narrator's mind. On the one hand, there are vivid images of Żarki when it was a Jewish/Polish town, which she constructs using the stories she heard from people in the community who remember the pre-WW2 town. On the other, there is the present memoryscape of the town which she engages with through an embodied experience of walking, and this memoryscape serves as a trigger for imagining, constructing nostalgia for the encounters with Jews she never had. Imagining allows her to deepen a connection with her town, because "imagining is a vital process in making coherent sense of the past and connecting it to the present and future" (Keightley and Pickering 2012, 5).

She identifies herself as someone with a position of knowledge in the community because she had contributed to the academic interests and research projects on Żarki's Jews:

> in 1983 there was a popular science session organized here about the 600 years existence of Żarki and I was one of the organizers. I invited Dr Anatol Leszczyński from the Jewish Historical Institute. (…) for many years we used to write to each other, I was actually collecting information for Dr Leszczyński related to the Jews from Żarki. Back then there used to live, then in 1983, lived still many people who simply remembered directly, so I could both from the side of my family as well as people, the inhabitants of Żarki find out a lot, a lot still. There was a publication "Historical sketches of Żarki", and there is an article of Dr Leszczyński there, and he emphasises that all the information from the Żarki area was collected by me. (…) good morning...<local coordinator passing by: lucky you, Ola, lucky you>I made some sort of... mm. a map for my own purposes, with the participation of my mother, who remembered very well these times. I have made a map, who lived in particular house, and then later on it was difficult for me to, while walking on the streets, not to see this in front of my eyes, right – where the grocery store had been located, where the St John's bread, where the baker was, where there were various other things and this has somehow just stayed in me. This was precisely quite interesting this map of the Jewish inhabitants, in which house what was being produced. (Interviewee B, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015)

The events from the 1980s which that she describes were excluded from official narratives about the cultivation of local Jewish heritage, as presented by the municipality or the employees of public institutions during the visit of the itinerant museum. For the narrator, the period she refers to in the 1980s, however, was most important and fruitful for developing her own interest in the Jewish/Polish past of her town, but also her social life was at the time very busy and attractive. She is nostalgic and longs for that time, her younger years, when she used to be the unofficial local expert on the Jewish past of Żarki. Her account and experience did not seem to be explicitly integrated into the current memoryscape.

In Żarki, from what I observed, stories about the cultivation and revival of the interest in the local Jewish heritage began in the 2000s. The material elements of this heritage are emphasised: in the tourist information brochures, websites and accounts of public servants, the commercial and touristic value of the former properties of the Jewish community, particularly of the synagogue and the cemeteries are highlighted (Interviewee W, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015). The woman I talked to narrated a different, intimate relationship with

Polish/Jewish past. In present-day Żarki, she is recognized as a knowledgeable and respectable member of the community: she is greeted by numerous individuals passing by during the interview and the local coordinator describes her as a person with a sincere and emotional interest in the history of Żarki's Jews (Interviewee I, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015). Yet, the interviewee's perspective and the difficultly of the encounter with the Jewish other between the past and the present that she tries to deal with, was excluded from the officially-promoted narratives, emphasising the value of commodifiable local Jewish heritage. Personal stories such as hers, were given secondary importance in the official narratives about local past as presented by the public institutions.

For the interviewee, the difficulty seems to lay in a constant and challenging encounter with a nostalgic imagination, and this encounter requires effort from her part. In the process of imagining, to quote Molly Andrews "the real and the not-real are not then polar opposites but, rather, are positioned in relation to one another, linked by a thread of ongoing change and perpetual becoming" (2014, 6). In the case of the interviewee, the imagination is focused on the past and the present, it is nostalgic, related to longing for something that "no longer exists or never existed" (Boym 2001, xiii). However, it is important to note that "what we imagine may not necessarily be rooted in any verifiable memory, but the possibility of this does not in itself deny the positive role which imagination plays in the narrative development of a life-story (...)." (Keightley and Pickering 2012, 5). Furthermore, here the nostalgic imaginative encounter might be seen as a positive one because it is about "keeping alive certain counter-narratives that rub against the grain of established social orthodoxies and political pieties" (ibid., 116). Therefore, her involvement can be interpreted as an example of a critical engagement with collective memory on the vernacular level which may lead to challenging exclusions and misconceptions about Jews in the local memoryscape.

There was yet another element which made the interaction with this interviewee stand out in the context of other interviews conducted in Żarki and elsewhere in Poland in relation to this research. At the end of the audio-recorded interview she was asked whether she wants to add anything to what she said earlier on in the conversation. She responded with the following:

> Ah well... actually... but this feels somewhat silly, to talk about this, because this is more of a human duty rather than anything, but my grandfather also a Jewish family, maybe I will say it this way, he hid them, but – this does not have to be recorded. (Interviewee B, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015)

The interviewee, through the request to turn off the recorder articulates that she wants to keep a certain level of control over what and how she tells her story. Although she does not want to perform this on the audio recorded record, she does want to recount one more story about her grandparents.[91] This story seems to complete her account of personal and nostalgic connection to the past but also once again it demonstrates that she is engaged in affectively exploring the difficult elements of the Polish/Jewish past. First, she briefly and without details says that her grandfather rescued two or three Jews (she mentions names) by hiding them in a building by his house and delivering them food and a bucket. Stories about non-Jews helping Jews during WW2 by giving them food, offering a place to hide or supporting in other ways were certainly not uncommon in accounts recounted in the context of *Museum on Wheels'* intervention in rural Poland during the period of data collection for this thesis. What is unusual, however, was that the names of saved Jews would be mentioned, and it is even more rare that a person would deliberately ask not to have the story audio-recorded, or in other words not to have it treated as essential to their performance in the interview. This is another way in which the interviewee seems to seek to challenge the tropes which are depicted as the standard and common ones in narrativizing Polish/Jewish past, here it is about

[91]The interviewee was aware that this may be included as part of the research and consented for me to take notes of what she was saying.

Righteous Defence (Grabowski 2016), which is explored in detail in the following chapter. Before concluding this chapter, however, the final element of the account of the interviewee from Żarki needs attention.

In the very last, off-record, part of the interaction the interviewee made a final evaluation of the Polish/Jewish past of the town, yet another time mentioning her connection to the town's history: she once again emphasised that her grandfather was the governor of the town. She concluded that in Żarki it was not important whether a person was Jewish or Polish, but whether one was a citizen of the town or not, and she saw the strength of the town in that it was built together. In this way, the interviewee painted the picture of a Polish/Jewish Żarki whose core feature was the connection to a place. Place is the most important element in defining who one is: investing time and effort into building something together with others from the village or town makes a person part of the community, no matter how one identifies himself or herself, or how others identify him or her. The ideas about belonging and inclusion/exclusion into memoryscapes, presented in this interview, are, therefore, different from the ones of the interviewee from Koźminek. Neither of the two interactions analysed can be described as representative or exemplary of how collective memory about Jews was narrativized on the vernacular level in each town. They can be seen, nevertheless, as samples of how the key tropes I identified for the productive reception of *MoW* were articulated and how they interacted with the different elements of the local memoryscapes.

7.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I analysed productive reception of the travelling museum: the visitors were not only receiving what they see or hear by repeating it, but they engaged with the content by negotiating inclusion into or exclusion from the local community and local Polish/Jewish memoryscapes. With the examples I chose I wanted to demonstrate that the opportunities to engage in storytelling were a way for the storytellers to recognize their individual agency,

and this agency allowed them to engage in negotiating their own inclusion into or exclusion from the local community, as well as that of Jews into the local Jewish/Polish memoryscapes. These stories, then, are articulations of collective memory about Jews on vernacular level which is created in the interactions occurring in the context of *MoW*'s visit.

Excerpts from two interviews were selected to demonstrate some of the ways in which locals narrated Jewish/Polish memoryscapes during the ephemeral interventions of *MoW* in 2015. Difficult memory about the Holocaust and the behaviour of the non-Jewish majority towards Jews, even if not explicitly analysed in this chapter, remained the basis of the interviewees' efforts to define their position in the community and negotiate the inclusion or exclusion of Jews. Jewish absence in the present, which is intrinsically connected to the reason for this absence, the Holocaust, and difficult memory related to it, was found in interviewees' stories, providing the framework for negotiations of belonging to the local community.

For the first interviewee it was expressed through, for example, delineating the boundaries between acceptable behaviours of people from his town versus negatively-assessed actions of people from the outside, connected to the communist governmental machine, who in his eyes were the key agents responsible for defaming the cemetery. The interviewee also positioned himself as a good citizen who cares about Jewish heritage, wants to talk about it, and attends meetings to discuss what to do with it. I showed, nonetheless, by analysing the language and vocabulary he used that this was done most likely to negotiate his own belonging to the community and demonstrate that he understands what is expected of him if he wants to be perceived as a caring local citizen. The allosemitic tropes were a vocabulary used by the interviewee to exclude Jews from the local memoryscape and simultaneously include himself as a member of a local community. This happened despite the local events run during the visit of *MoW* which encouraged critical examination of the

Jewish/Polish past, including antisemitic misconceptions which the interviewee was reproducing.

For the second interviewee, the core of the story was also about belonging. Yet, for her the inclusion into and exclusion from local community did not depend as much on delineating borders between herself, locals, and others. She focused more on the connection she felt she had with the place, through her family history as well as her own work and involvement in learning about the local past. Her connection to the former Jewish community was not through sites such as local the Jewish cemetery or synagogue but was experienced through the stories which she relied on her imagination. As Emily Keightly and Michael Pickering write, "imagination and imaginative engagement are of vital importance in acts and processes of remembering" (2012, 1). The preoccupation with Jewish absence of the interviewee was articulated in her affective connection with the past that she narrativized in the story she told me. Her own belonging to the local community was defined through nostalgia towards Jewish/Polish past and sadness about Jewish absence in the present, but Jews were not defined through the allosemitic othering, rather, they were an integral part of the memoryscape in which she felt at home. Thus, her storytelling can be described as an attempt to critically engage with the collective memory narratives on the vernacular level.

Overall, the stories told to staff and local coordinators, as well as conversations between people visiting the pavilion, are valuable for understanding the collaborative shaping of *MoW* in that they demonstrate local interest and point at which elements of the project resound most with the visitor's knowledge or expectations. My understanding of productive reception, is, then, related to how John Falk and Lynn Dierking conceptualise visitors' experience in the museum, as involving personal, sociocultural and physical context (2016, 33). The analysis demonstrated how in the productive reception of *MoW,* allosemitic and nostalgic tropes were articulated. These interactions of locals with the project were a

contribution to a collaborative creation of the ephemeral visit of the museum in the town, a visit that was defined by a tension between the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence and the institutional agenda of POLIN and its stories about continuity of Jewish life in Poland, as this thesis argues.

CHAPTER EIGHT Resolving the tension? Stories about Righteous Gentiles

In the previous chapter I explored how in the productive reception of *MoW,* nostalgic and allosemitic tropes emerged in locals' stories. Another trope which has not yet been explored but has played a significant role in the engagements of locals with the itinerant project of POLIN, were stories about rescuing, saving, hiding and helping Jews by non-Jews during WW2 and the Holocaust. In the data I collected for this thesis, stories about the Righteous emerged not only in the interviews, but also formed one of the central elements of the *Museum on Wheels* project. This was because a supplementary exhibition entitled: "They risked their lives. Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust" was brought together with *MoW* on tour to most of the locations in 2015, 2016 and some in 2017.[92] For POLIN Museum, including such stories in an accompanying exhibition, as the staff explained, was a way to respond to the requests they received from various local actors. Thus, incorporating this exhibition supported the itinerant museum organisers in claiming that the evolution of *MoW* was shaped and influenced by feedback from visited communities. In other words, including stories about the Righteous contributed to building a brand which emphasises responsiveness and interest in visitors' views and needs.

As for locals' stories about the Righteous, in this chapter I argue that they were to a large extent used to provide a narrative which upholds a positive image of the national (Polish, Catholic) or the local communities. Following Jan Grabowski (2016), I refer to these stories as a trope of Righteous Defence. In this thesis the trope of Righteous Defence includes

[92]This is the title of the English version of the exhibition, which was first, as the English version has been produced and shown in POLIN Museum in Warsaw as well as in various places outside of Poland. The Polish version reads "Z narażeniem życia. Polacy ratujący Żydów podczas Zagłady". The translation into English makes a personal form out of the impersonal used in Polish: 'life under threat' or 'with the risk of life' becomes "they risked their lives". Having a different Polish version of the title could be interpreted as a deliberate effort to prevent the reader, most likely a Roman Catholic Pole, from identifying Poles as a whole, from the start, as the nation who saved the Jews. Thus, starting with a deictic reference to Poles by referring to 'them', an impersonal form of the phrase was chosen.

stories about non-Jews helping Jews in Poland where the righteousness and sacrifice of those offering help is emphasised and the context and behaviours of those who did not help is not explained. The museum in most cases did not engage with these stories in-depth and for this reason, in addition to other elements described in previous chapters, for example in relation to local events, it insufficiently acknowledged the complexity of the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence.

The museum's approach to stories about the Righteous in their exhibition did not seek to invoke the trope of Righteous Defence *per se,* but rather offered the locals a nuanced narrative about non-Jews who helped Jews during the Holocaust, placing it in a broader context of different approaches that non-Jews adapted at the time. However, because this exhibition was treated differently than the *MoW* pavilion in the structure of the project, there were no guided tours by educators and there were rarely activities run by POLIN's staff linked to the exhibition. Connecting the topic to collective memory on the vernacular level was left to the discretion of locals, and this chapter shows that this often meant that the trope of Righteous Defence was evoked. Thus, even though it was not a deliberate decision of the museum, the institution was also involved in mobilising the trope of Righteous Defence.

The chapter is composed of three sections. In the first section, I explain how the legislation which punishes anyone who claims that Poland or Poles are to be held responsible for Nazi crimes emerged and was received in Poland and abroad. This law is an element of the broader memory politics, of which other elements are discussed in Chapter Two, that influenced how the trope of Righteous Defence resonated in the collaborative museum-making of *MoW*. In the second section I suggest that POLIN's decision to include an exhibition on non-Jewish Poles saving Jewish Poles during the Holocaust was an element of the branding strategy of the museum. This meant that not only was the institution being responsive to locals' needs, but also that its decisions resonated with the wider tropes

prevalent in collective memory about Jews in Poland, as represented in, for instance, public media, governmental policies, or school curricula. In the third section, I explore how the stories about noble Gentiles helping Jews were evoked to validate individuals' positions in the community and define belonging. Jews in these stories were mostly an allosemitic construction and they were not granted agency in local memoryscapes.

8.2 Narrating the Holocaust in Poland's political agenda

On the level of governmental memory politics, Jan Grabowski (2016) identifies a wide trend, which is connected to Righteous Among the Nations in Poland: he calls it a state-sponsored approach of 'pedagogy of shamelessness'. It includes the instrumental usage of Poles recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations for helping Jews during the Holocaust and transforming it into a strategy of the Righteous Defence. The persistent "reminders and celebrations of Polish sacrifice and righteousness at the time of the Shoah are now a trademark or branding exercise of history policy" targeted at audiences in Poland and abroad (Grabowski 2016, 484). The publicly-demonstrated support for this approach intensified after the right-wing nationalistic Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość,* PiS) won the elections in October 2015 and started introducing stronger legal instruments to, in the words of Zbigniew Ziobro, The Minister of Justice, "defend Poland's good name". I described these changes in Chapter Two.

These changes culminated in the introduction of legislation in 2016 which makes it illegal to place responsibility or co-responsibility on Poland or Polish people for the crimes committed by Nazis (Kroet 2016). Yet, the discussions on 'defending the good name of the Polish nation' are not a novel phenomenon, rather, they are an intensification of the on-going 'branding' of history policy. For supporters of the right-wing groups in general "any discussion of Poles' role in the Holocaust is perceived as defamation of the Polish nation (…)" (Zubrzycki 2016b, 257). In the widespread public discussions following the publication

of "Neighbours" by Jan Gross, which were described in Chapter Two, the resistance against engaging with the complexity of Holocaust history in Poland was articulated in the self-defensive approach. The self-defensive approach focused on neutralizing the book's message and seeking to maintain the emphasis on innocent victimhood of non-Jewish Poles in the hands of Nazi oppressors (Michlic 2007). This approach is rooted in the central element of national mythology in Poland: martyrological messianism, as described by Geneviève Zubrzycki (2016b). Martyrological messianism, Zubrzycki writes, is a key myth depicting the history of Poland as dominated by the innocent sacrifice, suffering and martyrdom of Poles, where being a Pole signifies being a Roman Catholic (ibid.). Upholding a positive image is also crucial to the trope of Righteous Defence.

When in 2016 legislation was prepared to make it illegal to place responsibility or co-responsibility on Poland or Polish people for the crimes committed by Nazis, the politicians of the Law and Justice party explained that the fundamental aim of the new legislation was to punish for using the term 'Polish death camps' (or similar) as the camps located in Poland were not Polish, but German Nazi camps (Wójcik 2018). The law, amended Act on the Institute of National Remembrance, was adopted by Parliament and signed by the President by early February 2018.[93] On the 27th of June the same year, however, Polish Parliament, and subsequently the President, accepted another modification to the amended Act: the threat of criminal charges was withdrawn; however, it is still be possible to make charges using civil action. The reasons the legislation was changed in a rush without any debate are not fully clear, but it could be because the government initially underestimated the detrimental consequences the law might bring to the position of the country abroad.[94]

[93]The President passed the Act on to the Constitutional Tribunal to confirm that what it includes and how it is formulated is in accordance with Polish Constitution.
[94]For a further discussion on the modified legislation (see Gazeta Wyborcza: Kośmiński and Woźnicki 2018) or The Washington Post (Associated Press 2018).

The Act indicates that academic and artistic activity is excerpt from legal charges. Yet, as Barbara Engelking argues in an interview for wyborcza.pl published on 29 January 2018: "excepting historians and artists from punishing is only a smoke screen" – even if academic research is not to be restricted, it is not clear how and whether, according to the amended act, this research can be popularized, for example in the media (Skarżyński 2018). Even though the most controversial element of the law was eventually withdrawn, for the few months when the law was in force it caused anxiety and uncertainty among scholars, educators, artists and others who work on topics related to the Holocaust. Also, as scholars gathered in Kraków on the 1st of July 2018 noted,[95] the withdrawal of the instrument of criminal charges in the updated legislation did not change much for how attempts to engage with difficult topics related to the Holocaust and Polish/Jewish past would be received and criticised in mainstream media, by the government, and public institutions dependent on the government.

The amended legislation can be seen as part of the state-sponsored pedagogy of shamelessness described by Jan Grabowski. Grabowski identifies at its core the effort to create "a new national myth, agreeable to home audiences and palatable to foreigners" (Grabowski 2016, 484), which depicts non-Jewish Poles not just as innocent victims, but also saviours and helpers of Jewish Poles during WW2 and the Holocaust. The myth implies that the helping-hand phenomenon was universal on Nazi-occupied Polish territory (Grabowski 2016), while as historical sources and publications on the topic show, this it was not the case (Engelking and Grabowski 2018; Janicka 2015b). The notions of 'victimhood', 'perpetratorship' and the positions of individuals as victims, perpetrators, saviours or helpers were mentioned in the above paragraphs, but how these are related to narratives about the

[95]I refer to a debate organized on the 1st of July in Galicja Jewish Museum in Kraków, which was part of the Summer School "Teaching about the Holocaust". The panelists included Professor Jan Grabowski, Dr Alicja Bartuś and Professor Michael Berenbaum, among others.

Holocaust in Poland and Righteous non-Jewish Poles in particular, requires further explanation.

I choose the concept of 'positioning' instead of 'role' in this thesis following Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harre, to emphasise the dynamic aspects of interpersonal interactions instead of the "static, formal and ritualistic aspects" (1990, 43) that the concept of role highlights. Individuals engage in encounters from a position "bringing to the particular situation their history as a subjective being, that is the history of one who has been in multiple positions and engaged in different forms of discourse" (ibid., 48). Although Davies and Harre focus on the discursive production of selfhood, their approach can be applied to analysing narratives more broadly. Importantly, the concept of position brings attention to agency, as it is not only concentrating on the discursive practices of creating particular positions - in a storytelling context for both speakers and listeners - but is also "a resource through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions" (ibid., 62). To relate this to Raul Hilberg's (1993) distinction between victims, perpetrators and bystanders in the Holocaust, employing the notion of 'position' acknowledges the dynamism and fluidity inherent in this division. It is not that individuals are victims or bystanders, and remain so in every situation, context and interaction, but that their positions can change, and they do change, and this is especially salient to examine non-Jewish Poles positions' during the Holocaust.

Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski (2016) demonstrate how the prevalent narrative about the Holocaust in the public sphere in Poland after 2000 "either completely evacuates Polish majority out of the depicted world or evidently constitutes on the Hilberg's triad – clear division between perpetrators, victims and bystanders, where victims and bystanders are firmly separated by foreign violence" (13). As an alternative to this, examining the Polish context, Elżbieta Janicka (2015a) argues for replacing the term

'bystander', as a notion implying indifference and lack of agency, with the category of participant observer. Observing, watching "would be a form of activity, a way of having an influence on the events, of agency, and therefore participation" (Janicka 2015a, 148). Using the trope of Righteous Defence in policy-making similarly seeks to substitute the passivity and indifference implied in the concept of bystanding. But, while Janicka's notion seeks to unveil how antisemitism, which was common among non-Jewish Poles, contributed to defining their agency in the Holocaust, in Righteous Defence the emphasis on helping and saving the Jews is aimed at the contrary. Righteous Defence seeks to strengthen the myth of universal selfless sacrifice of non-Jewish Poles where Jewish Poles are objectified victims at the mercy of their saviours, non-Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland. In the following sections I discuss how the trope of Righteous Defence was evoked in what *Museum on Wheels* offered and in the stories of locals who interacted with the project.

8.3 Stories about the Righteous as a bargaining card on the *MoW* tour

In the 2015 tour of *Museum on Wheels,* the exhibition on Righteous Among the Nations began travelling with the pavilion as a series of large panels which could be placed in any local community building open to visitors. The exhibition was shown in almost all towns visited by *MoW* since Spring 2015, although in some places, due to space restrictions, not all pieces were presented. The exhibition remained in the town for as long as the *Museum on Wheels* pavilion itself: it was open for three days and opening hours depended on the building in which the panels were located. "They risked their lives. Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust" was initially created in English in 2013 from materials gathered in an oral history project run by POLIN Museum: "Righteous Poles – Recalling Forgotten History" (POLIN 2013).

The exhibition was funded by Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and its original aim was "to present to the viewers from abroad the Polish Righteous Among the Nations as a

unique group in the context of other European nations" (POLIN 2014). It consisted of 18 panels explaining the historical context of the Nazi occupation of Poland that take took place, and the conditions and dangers involved in helping and saving Jews by non-Jews. Apart from archival sources and historical analyses, it quoted numerous oral history interviews and included photos, maps and at least one or two highlighted quotes on each panel. Below are a few photos (Figures 11-15) I took in September 2016 of the panels included in the exhibition.

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

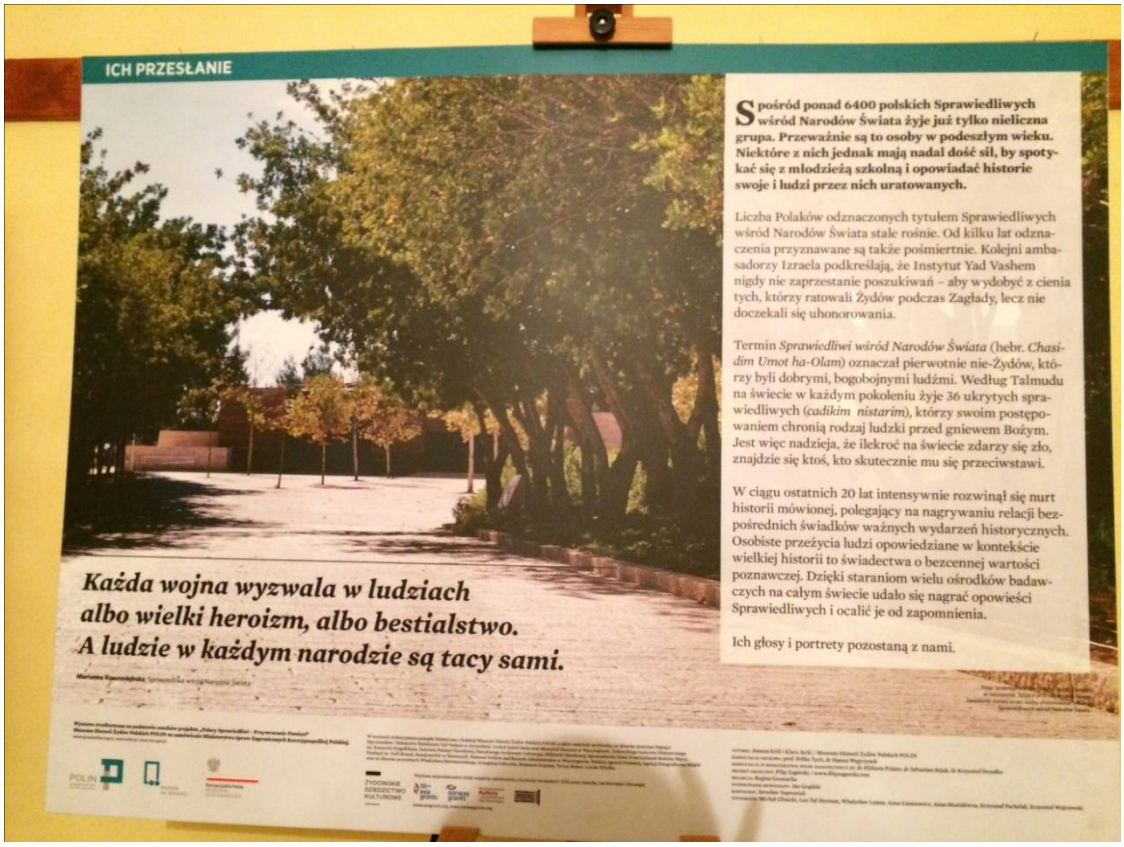

Figure 15

In an e-mail from 12th of June 2017, one of the coordinators of *MoW* from POLIN Museum explained to me the reasons for taking the above exhibition on tour with *MoW*. Firstly, she wrote, this exhibition's content differs from what is presented in the pavilion but still it is "an important topic". Another reason, in her opinion, was that: "it is our 'bargaining card' – people who initially are reluctant towards *MoW* exhibition start according more respect to us when they find out that the exhibition on Righteous travels with us." The coordinator explained that in 2014 there were certain questions raised, she did not specify by whom, but most likely by local activists and/or visitors about the Righteous, "questions slash accusations – that since we are speaking about Jews why are we not speaking about the Righteous". In this sense, *Museum on Wheels* responded and engaged with the needs expressed by locals in visited towns to address the topic of the Holocaust and the approaches of non-Jews to Jews during Nazi occupation.

The topic was addressed by including the prevalent trope on non-Jews helping Jews, which in the meantime (since 2015 when the exhibition joined the pavilion) was gaining increasing salience in the political sphere, as I already explained in the previous section. The focus of the pavilion remained on the centuries of Jewish presence in Poland and the Holocaust was one of the many elements presented. Yet, the disproportion between the attention granted to the Righteous through the accompanying exhibition and the limited content concentrated on the Holocaust in the pavilion could be interpreted by locals in visited towns as a confirmation of the misconception that saving and helping Jews was the most universal among approaches of non-Jews in Nazi-occupied Poland. The content of what was presented in the pavilion and the accompanying exhibition was certainly only one of the elements of *MoW*'s intervention, but for some locals, skimming through or carefully reading part or all of one or two of these exhibitions was the only way they engaged with POLIN's project. Thus, for them, seeing the exhibition about non-Jews helping Jews during the Holocaust could contribute to collaborative amnesia about the difficult elements of Polish/Jewish past. One of the dangers involved in celebrating non-Jewish sacrifice and righteousness without providing a broader context, could be that it provides a narrative to employ in collaboratively avoiding challenging questions about hostile and violent behaviours towards the Jews during the Holocaust.

Only some locals engaged more actively in the productive reception of the project, for instance by interacting with POLIN's staff, attending or taking part in the associated local program, which could have offered them a chance to engage with the complexity of Polish/Jewish past. Considering the idea behind the exhibition, the reasons why it was taken on tour with *Museum on Wheels,* and finally its explicit focus on stories of non-Jews helping Jews during the Holocaust and WW2, demonstrates that Righteous Defence was a prevalent trope contributing to the context of culture in which individuals engaged with *Museum on*

Wheels. For POLIN, the itinerant project helped to establish an image of a museum that engages with and responds to the feedback provided by visitors and other actors involved. Yet, by leaving the exhibition aside, and not connecting it to educators' work or offering guidance, the museum insufficiently acknowledged the opportunity that the exhibition offered them: to support local activists and visitors in understanding the difficult Polish/Jewish memory related to the Holocaust.

In 2015 this accompanying exhibition was with the pavilion in almost all the towns, and, in almost all of the 15 towns in which I observed it, it was presented without the introduction or guidance of educators or other employees of POLIN Museum. This suggests that although the exhibition brought this particular project to most of its destinations, the project did not play a significant role in *MoW's* engagement with locals in rural Poland for POLIN Museum itself. For POLIN, including this additional exhibition was guided by a willingness to create an image of the institution as a visitors-oriented and responsive museum, and whether the content could contribute to engagements with difficult memory about Polish/Jewish past was of less importance. The locals were offered an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the exhibition, if they wished to do so, and thus the presence of this opportunity was an element of the context of situation for the interactions evoked by *Museum on Wheels*. The presence of the exhibition and its content were mentioned in some of the interviews I conducted with locals, and a selection of these interactions is analysed below using data from Żarki, Namysłów and Przeworsk.

8.4 The Righteous in delineating boundaries of (local) belonging

One of the questions most interviewees received from me was what, from their point of view, do people in their town or people in Poland in general know about Jews or Jewish past in the respective geographical territory. This is where sometimes the mention of non-Jews saving or helping Jews during WW2 and the Holocaust appeared. Some interviewees talked about

Righteous Among the Nations or the positions and behaviours of non-Jews during WW2 while commenting on POLIN Museum's exhibition "They risked their lives (…)" or as part of some other reflections on memory, education or commemoration. The quotes from interviews analysed here illustrate a range of ways in which references to the trope of Righteous Defence were made during encounters taking place in the context of *MoW*'s visits. The self-image of the person speaking and/or of the collective: (town inhabitants' or the nation that one identifies with), comes to the fore in these stories about help offered to Jews during WW2 and the Holocaust. The agency stays with the speaker and/or the group he or she is referring to, and in most cases 'Jews' are depicted from an allosemitic perspective: they remain an abstract entity, a subject deprived of agency, whose position is not questioned or subject of empathy of the speaker.

8.4.1 "We helped the Jews"

Although such a phrase was not uttered in the interactions I observed or interviews I conducted, it is a reasonable reflection of the perspective of certain interviewees from the non-Jewish majority constructing the Jewish/Polish rural memoryscape. As mentioned above, a question on interviewees' knowledge about Jews or Jewish past in Poland at times triggered a response related to the help that non-Jews offered to Jews during the Holocaust. Stories in which this was told reveal aspects of local inclusion and exclusion dynamics. In Żarki an interviewee when asked whether she personally knows any Jews responded:

> No, not me, I only heard that this lady lives here. She was granted <the title of> Righteous Among the Nations, Ms Jadwiga, and actually she hid. She actually hid, hid the Jews, and she is not alive anymore, here actually in Żarki. (Interviewee C, Female, Żarki, 18.06.2015)

For the woman, stories of helping and hiding Jews seem to take precedence over remembering Jews that she potentially met in her life. It came out later in the interview that when she was growing up in another town in southern Poland, Bytom, she had some schoolmates who were Jewish, and one of them was a friend of hers in high school. The Jews

then left in “the period of persecution”, in the 1970s, she said, most likely referring to the antisemitic campaign of 1968, and her contact with that friend was lost. Yet, her older memories of local Jews in Bytom did not come up in response to the question of whether she might know any Jews. This can be interpreted as an articulation of the prevalence of the Righteous Defence trope within the local memoryscapes, which is a perspective implying that Jews lack agency and form an abstract and separate group. Stories of Righteous are therefore more pervasive and fitting to the allosemitic representation of Jews than accounts about and of former Jewish inhabitants of the country.

In the same town, however, another interviewee (Interviewee B, Female, Żarki, 19.06.2015), whose account was already analysed in the previous chapter, described a story about helping Jews in a very different manner. At the end of the recorded conversation, the interviewee mentioned that her grandfather saved some Jews during the Holocaust, but she did not want that part of the story to be audio recorded. After I turned off the recorder, she began naming the Jews that were hidden by her grandfather, and shortly described the help he offered. Telling the story to me allowed the woman to situate herself and her family in the local community and thus it was a manner of compliance with the emphasis on stories about non-Jews helping Jews, while downplaying denunciations, hostility and other types of violence of non-Jewish majority in narratives about the Nazi occupation and the Holocaust. Nonetheless, what makes this example significant and distinct from others, is that the interviewee referred to Jews using their names, both in the story of hiding them and others, which she recalled in the conversation. This can be interpreted as a way of granting some agency to the Jews, concretizing them and providing potential for empathy. These two examples from the same town show that the trope of Righteous Defence could be evoked in different ways, not only to present Jews through an allosemitic lens.

8.4.2 "well, there are the Ulmas"

In Przeworsk, a history teacher who brought a group from a neighbouring village to see *MoW* reflected on how he teaches his students about Jews. He explained that when he talks about WW2, he says that Jews from the village were killed, but makes sure to mention that there were also (non-Jewish) Poles in the town saving Jews who received the medal of Righteous Among the Nations to honour this. He added:

> (...) these people, of course, are not alive anymore, but their descendants are, where, what, how, this kind of interest emerges, well, we have a picture of this medal or diploma, somewhere in the book, because I published a book about village x, so it is all there, that there was a community where, where there were Jews, where they went to school, so well, this is what it is. (Interviewee D, Male, Przeworsk, 13.09.2016)

For the teacher, talking about Jews and WW2 in the local memoryscape led directly to the Righteous. Elsewhere in the interview, he reflected on xenophobic or antisemitic approaches he noticed among his students or generally in the public sphere at present, and he also mentioned in relation to the past an array of other approaches towards the Jews in Poland, many of which were not so favourable. Yet, his account demonstrates how the trope of Righteous Defence can be used inconspicuously.

First, the stories about non-Jews helping Jews are evoked by the teacher to position himself as a person identifying with the local community, where talking about saving Jews was the key trope for situating Jews in the local memoryscape. This does not apply to all towns analysed, but in Przeworsk the proximity of the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in WW2 in Markowa and the corresponding public awareness of the aim and message of this museum in the area, seemed to support the positioning of the narrative of selfless sacrifice of non-Jewish majority as the core way to 'include' Jews. Yet, this 'inclusion' of Jews as imagined by non-Jews was rather an exclusion of Jews as subjects capable of action and having agency to contribute with their perspectives to the memoryscape.

Secondly, the teacher does not only demonstrate he is aware of the key trope related to Jews in the local memoryscape (about the Righteous), he also seeks to position himself as a capable agent contributing to sustaining this key trope. He described how he taught his students about the Righteous, hoped to take them to the museum in Markowa, but also said that he wrote a book about local history where he highlights the story of a local couple who was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations title. The way in which the teacher evokes the Righteous Defence trope, then, is connected to self-image in a double sense: on the one hand it was about non-Jewish Poles as a community, defined largely by the myth of selfless sacrifice for the Jewish Poles, and on the other it refers to his own self-image as a valuable member of the local community, contributing to constructing and sustaining narratives about local Righteous. Although the teacher was reflexive about the patterns and mechanisms of xenophobia and discrimination, it cannot be concluded on the basis of the interview alone whether, and how, during interactions with his students or others embedded in the local memoryscape, he was able to reflect on the exclusion of Jews articulated through depriving them of agency in the constructions of memoryscapes by non-Jewish majority.

Another interviewee from Przeworsk expressed a related position regarding Jews in the local memoryscape. From her perspective, however, the emphasis on the story of the Ulma family in the area pushes other stories related to local Jews out of the memoryscape:

> About Przeworsk there is a little said about, about the Jews of Przeworsk. (…) At ours there is the Ulma family, they are <present> all the time, even somewhere there was some mass recently dedicated to this family. But Jews from Przeworsk are not talked about, here what is talked about is the Ulma family, about the Przeworsk <Jews> little is known (…). (Interviewee E, Female, Przeworsk, 13.09.2016)

A similar reflection was offered by another interviewee who visited *MoW* in Przeworsk.

> When an accusation is made about collaboration with the Germans, like denunciation of Jews or *szmalcownictwo*[96] then directly it is said: well, there are the Ulmas and so on, the fig leaf is taken out of the sleeve and it does not suffice unfortunately, it does not suffice. And again, unfortunately, also an evil story. Sad story, where it was not

[96]As explained in Chapter Two, there is no English term for this and therefore I do not translate it.

> possible to save someone. Why is it that again death is to be the basic one? Why is death some kind of key in general to make the choice... to tell a story about the self... why can it not be life? (Interviewee F, Male, Przeworsk, 12.09.2016)

The interviewee is critical of highlighting the "sad story" about a non-Jewish family being killed together with the Jews they were giving shelter to. It bothers him that negative, upsetting accounts are used to support collective memory in Poland. In this way he notes the importance of a positive image for sustaining the sense of the national or local communities of non-Jewish majority which is evoked in stories about the Holocaust. He acknowledges that the example of "the Ulmas and alike" are used to cover up cases of violence or hostility towards the Jews, or instances of collaboration with German Nazis occupying Poland, and this observation is similar to Jan Grabowski's (2016) on how Righteous Defence strategy works.

Grabowski (2016) explains that employing the Righteous Defence strategy enables "the gradual shift of Jewish victims to the periphery of the historical account and their systematic replacement with noble Gentiles" (485). Placing the Righteous non-Jewish Poles in the focus of every account is the first step in the process, he adds. The interviewee mentioned above seemed to recognize the instrumentalization of the stories of Righteous, and elsewhere in the interview he reflected on the positions of Jews and non-Jews during the Holocaust and Nazi occupation, as well as in contributing to present-day memoryscapes of Jewish/Polish past.

Although he did not situate himself as a local rooted in the community of Przeworsk, he said he did mention that he was born and grew up in the town, but that for many years now he had been living away and only by chance encountered *MoW* when visiting his hometown. Self-image for him was not tied to evoking the stories prevalent in the local memoryscape, he presented himself as having distance to what was going on in the town, and as a person interested in local present and past but pursuing the interest independently, not caring about

how others in Przeworsk see him. The theme of individuals' mobility, moving between towns and countries both historically and currently, often appeared explicitly or inexplicitly in the accounts of people I interviewed. I explore this in the next section with examples of encounters in Namysłów, where much of the local population did not live in the area for more than one generation, providing another case in point.

8.4.3 "the point of view of the Jewish Museum"

An interviewee in Namysłów recounted that she remembers (not from personal experience, she did not live yet at the time) that during WW2, Jews were persecuted by the Nazi Germans, and she explained:

> About this I remember, because during the high school period, right, they once used to tell us. How they were hiding... not only, I think, Poles also, Poles, Ukrainians and other nationalities were hiding the Jews <to protect them> from destruction. (Interviewee G, Female, Namysłów, 07.06.2015)

The interviewee came from Ukraine and told me she had been living in Poland for almost 15 years. In her account the "they" she deictically refers to when recalling that she was told stories about hiding Jews, are Ukrainians, as they seem to be the primary group she identifies with. She then adds that Poles, meaning Catholic, non-Jewish Poles, "she thinks" also hid the Jews during the WW2. A similar pattern to that of the account of the teacher from a village nearby Przeworsk is in place here. The interviewee sought to demonstrate that she is socialized into the narratives prominent in the public discourse about the position of non-Jews saving Jews in Poland during the Holocaust, which has the group image at its core. By complying with these narratives about group self-image, she was negotiating her own self-image as literate in the local cultural codes, so belonging in the local and national communities. The self-image here might be particularly powerful because of her experience as an immigrant. In other parts of the interview she mentioned how happy she is in Poland with her daughter, and she expressed gratitude for the help she was granted from the local authorities in securing a flat and getting a job.

Another interviewee in Namysłów, also a migrant, from another part of Poland, negotiated his position of belonging in the community differently, by emphasising his expertise and cultural capital as a historian. He was interviewed after a lecture he gave on surnames of Jewish families living in Namysłów in the past. During the interview he evaluated the exhibition "They risked their lives (...)" in a lecture-like fashion, addressing me as if I were a student who needed to learn history from a non-Jewish perspective. Certainly, the context of the situation in many ways contributed to the dynamics of this interaction: the difference in age, gender, professional position and my status as a guest to the community, a temporary visitor in Namysłów against the interviewee's established expert position as a local historian and educator. For him the exhibition: "is obviously being presented from the point of view of the Jewish Museum". He continued that in his opinion what it was missing was, "an external point of view" which would be "an approach that would be sometimes downright quantitative", showing the numbers of non-Jews who helped Jews together with the number of cases when non-Jews denounced Jews. He explained that he thinks there were not more cases of denunciation in Poland than in "any other nation" and "very often the role of the denunciations is emphasised, without paying attention somehow that in the relation, in the context of those who saved Jews there were very few of them <denunciations or denunciators>". (Interviewee H, Male, Namysłów, 05.06.2015)

His account is an exemplary case of evoking the trope of the Righteous Defence. Even though the interviewee mentioned some of the hostile and violent approaches and behaviours of non-Jewish majority towards Jews during the Holocaust by referring to denunciation, it seems to be done mostly to reinforce his point about insufficient attention granted to the Righteous Poles. He left out anything that may disturb situating noble Gentiles at the centre of attention. The interviewee concluded his evaluation by saying:

> I think that blaming us for the Holocaust is one of these elements, which do not foster an improvement of Polish-Jewish relations. (…) That Jews were being murdered on

> Polish soil does not signify that Poles carry any sort of responsibility for these murders. (Interviewee H, Male, Namysłów, 05.06.2015)

The direct or indirect reference to 'blame' appears commonly in the trope of the Righteous Defence, for example in political speeches or media debates. Mentioning participation or collaboration of non-Jewish Poles with Nazis during the Holocaust in public debates often easily slips into a discussion of 'blame', where the speaker who talks about collaboration or participation is depicted as someone who puts blame on the Polish nation and does not acknowledge the cases where Jews were offered help from the non-Jewish Poles.[97] The depiction of the non-Jewish majority as innocent bystanders in the Nazi Holocaust is another element of the strategy of constructing an all-positive group image. Finally, the 'Polish-Jewish relations' mentioned are an allosemitic construct in this context, as Jews are an 'other' defined by the non-Jewish majority, and the rules for what is accepted and what is not in the 'relations' are to be defined by non-Jews, where image is valued more than the complexity and truthfulness of historical accounts (Janicka and Żukowski 2016).

8.5 Conclusions

In the stories told by inhabitants of rural Poland during *MoW*'s visits, the government-supported 'pedagogy of shamelessness' and the prevalence of the trope of Righteous Defence were significant elements of the context of culture in which individuals positioned themselves through their narration. Highlighting stories of the Righteous at the political level through speeches, legislation and support granted to some organisations and not others, which are taking place from 2015 until the time of writing, are the intensification of a trend,

[97]An example can be a statement of Adam Bodnar, Polish Ombudsman, who talked about the mechanisms of exclusion, discrimination in connection with the rise of Nazism in 1930s in Germany and then commented on the Holocaust and how also Poles were involved in it. The statement, made in the public television on the 20th of June 2017, caused much public discussion and especially right-wing media and the government were highly critical of the Ombudsman saying that in his statement he put the blame on the Polish nation for the Holocaust and in this way he harmed the good name of Polish nation. The Ombudsman issued a public letter few days later stating that he "apologises anyone who could have felt affected by these words" (Bodnar 2017). Adam Leszczyński in a commentary at OKO.press analyses how the statement made by the Ombudsman has been interpreted and criticized out of context of a longer response made by Bodnar in the television discussion (Leszczyński 2017).

an element of the ongoing negotiations of inclusion into and exclusion from collective memory narratives in Poland.

The interactions analysed above gathered during ethnographic research in 2015 and 2016 demonstrate how, in the local memoryscapes of rural Poland, Jews were included by granting them agency, or excluded, by depicting them in allosemitic terms as a distinct group. The analysis also pointed out how image and self-image in relation to the narratives about the Holocaust played a significant role in constructing memoryscapes in the interactions with me as a researcher. As Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski argue, the self-image is the main emotional and moral need demonstrated in narratives of non-Jews about Jews in Poland (2016, 10). Central to the self-image is "the issue of antisemitism, especially the position of Polish majority in the structure of the Holocaust" (ibid.). The interviewees were aware that their encounter with me was a performance of interpersonal interactions, and performance is defined by Erving Goffman as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants" (1959, 26). Storytelling allowed them to perform their position in relation to the local memoryscape and the community and avoiding or addressing difficult memory related to the Holocaust and antisemitism were elements of all the narratives analysed.

In this chapter, exploring how the trope of Righteous Defence was used on the one hand in the productive reception of stories, and on the other in the museum's narratives, is another way in which the dynamics of the tension between POLIN's agenda, which focused on promoting Jewish culture and traditions and emphasising continuity of Jewish life in Poland, and the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence, was exposed. The engagement of both the museum and the visitors with the trope of Righteous Defence appeared to resolve the tension between the museum and local communities, because both for the museum and for the locals it seemed to contribute to a positive self-image. Namely, the

museum wanted to build a narrative about itself as a responsive and engaged institution, and the visitors sought to connect to the museum's work through a trope which they were already familiar with, and which allowed them to maintain a positive image of their community.

However, in the long-term, the tension was not addressed, because for *MoW* the focus remained on POLIN's story of life and continuity, and the exhibition on the Righteous which addressed the preoccupation with Jewish absence more directly, was depicted as a side event of lesser importance for to the project, even if for some locals it appeared crucial for their engagement with *MoW*. Including the exhibition as an element of *MoW* was not used by the museum as an opportunity to engage with the complexity of collective memory about Jews on the vernacular level. Rather, it was treated as a tool in the branding strategy. The messages this exhibition contributed to the collaborative museum-making were downplayed, while building a narrative of a responsive museum took prevalence.

CONCLUSION

Preface

Over the past 30 years, Poland has undergone massive changes in multiple spheres: social, political, economic, cultural. I was born in October 1990 and the healthcare book for children which was given to my parents was still a copy printed in the communist period of Polish People's Republic (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*). Maybe there were many printed, and someone thought it would have been a waste to produce new ones labelled the Third Polish Republic (*Trzecia Rzeczpospolita Polska*) before using up the old ones they had already printed. The healthcare book can be seen as a symbol of the change of the political system in 1989/1990 in Poland: there was so much going on, so much to take care of, to learn, to regulate and discover, that some things had to be prioritised above others. In one of my interviews, a former civil servant who had a responsible role in the town hall of a small town in eastern Poland in the early 1990s said to me:

> For eight years, taking care of many issues related to the municipality, I have in reality neglected the memory about the past generations. Also about the Jewish generations. (Interviewee N, Male, Przeworsk, 13.09.2016)

After the collapse of communism in Poland, preserving memory about Jews and other minorities was certainly not among the priorities of many local governments, nor was it a key theme in public discussions at the national level. Yet, in some circles, especially among the intelligentsia, throughout communism but most demonstrably (in the press and cultural publications) since the 1980s, the Polish/Jewish past and how it is remembered were vividly discussed topics. As explained in Chapter Two, from 1990, much more was possible in the democratically-led political system, and it was in this context that a broader public interest in difficult memory about Jews in small towns and urban centres alike emerged and began developing through the efforts of institutions, groups and individual actors. In such a

political, economic and social context, the creation of Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN in Warsaw was possible. The project was first conceived in the 1990s and finally completed in 2014 when the institution opened its doors in Poland's capital. POLIN was among the first narrative museums in the country relying extensively on digital technologies, interactivity and the active participation of visitors. Offering cultural and educational events to various types of audiences is also among the key activities of the museum, as is outreach, which includes engaging with rural audiences.

For all these activities it is crucial to remember that the mobility of people, goods and data, as well as multiple opportunities for funding, are available due to Poland's membership in the EU and other international organisations. For instance, people can travel abroad to learn and then apply their acquired knowledge in Poland or elsewhere; citizens of other EU countries can easily be employed in Poland and contribute with their expertise; and institutions can work with partners from abroad, exchange practices or collaborate. The subject of this thesis, POLIN's *Museum on Wheels,* could be created and run thanks to the political changes which include Poland joining the EU in 2004 which granted it access to programs such as EEA and Norway Grants, from which the itinerant museum was funded. The writing of this thesis was also indirectly made possible thanks to Poland's membership in the EU: I can study and work abroad, and I am eligible for foreign scholarships to fund my research, such as the scholarship I received from the London Arts and Humanities Partnership to write this thesis in London. Treating this political context as a broader framework which enabled the itinerant museum to materialise and my research to be conducted, this thesis explored the difficult Jewish/Polish memory as it emerged through a collaborative interaction between a museum from the capital and local actors from rural Poland.

9.2 Introduction

This thesis is divided into eight chapters in order to contextualise and interrogate how the travelling *Museum on Wheels* was constructed within the framework of POLIN's aims, institutional structure and position in the public sphere as a socially relevant museum; how local visitors and activists in rural Poland engaged with the itinerant museum and articulated their needs; and how the narratives of Polish/Jewish past highlighted by *MoW* resonated (or not) with the local contexts and responses and expectations of the locals. It showed the difference between the museum's agenda, expectations and its central story and the various local agendas and needs, with a preoccupation with Jewish absence on the vernacular level. These differences produced tensions that significantly impacted on the collaboration between the institution from the capital city and the rural communities that *MoW* visited. In this concluding chapter I reiterate the arguments made in the thesis, point to some wider implications of this research for understanding travelling museums and collaboration in the museum context, and finally reflect on my methodology in light of the analysis conducted and offer broader conclusions stemming from this research.

Collaboration, in its various meanings, was central to my analysis. POLIN sought to create the travelling museum in collaboration with local activists and, to a certain extent, responding to visitors' needs and expectations. The local activists, as well as other members of the local community who interacted with *MoW*'s exhibition or events, demonstrated a collaborative approach by embracing POLIN's agenda and interpreting it to match with the local discourses. At the same time, there was also 'collaboration' between locals: there followed an unspoken agreement about what should and what should not be said to POLIN's staff and me as the researcher - the guests in the local community. The stories or material remnants which would shed negative light on the local or national community, or so it was probably thought, such as about hostility or violence towards Jews or other minority groups

during the Holocaust or earlier, denunciation of Jews or collaboration with the Nazi occupiers during WW2 were often, but not always, held back and replaced with the trope of Righteous Defence.

9.3 Collaborative museum-making of *MoW*

In the current democratic and capitalist context, of Poland and in the rest of Europe and the Western World, museums contribute to determining which aspects of the past are articulated in the present and how this is done. Visitors, and other actors who interact with or who are involved in museums' work are often invited to contribute with their stories, ideas, perspectives. Yet, as this thesis showed, creating a project as a collaboration between the institution and its various community partners, is a complex process which may bring to question who and how has decisive power and resources. It also demonstrated that the contribution of the community partners, and visitors, can be different from what the institution hopes and expects it to be. POLIN, as I explained in Chapter Two, expects visitors and any partners to be willing to critically engage with exclusions, questions assumptions and be curious about and open to the complexity of Polish/Jewish past. Yet, in this thesis it was demonstrated that the engagements of visitors and any partners in collaboratively creating museum projects might provoke a range of tropes: in the case of *MoW* it provoked nostalgic and allosemitic engagements, as shown in Chapters Six and Seven, which were not the ones the museum sought to provoke.

Overall, the vernacular preoccupation with Jewish absence was a powerful element influencing the contribution of locals to the travelling museum, yet, I argue in this thesis, it was underestimated in the structure of *MoW*. By stating that it was underestimated, I do not suggest that POLIN Museum did not recognize the importance of Jewish absence and its role in the memoryscapes in the towns and villages it visited. Rather, as Chapter Six demonstrated, this preoccupation was considered a valuable contribution by the museum

when it translated into high numbers of visitors to the museum pavilion or to well-attended local events. What is valuable for the institution, in this case, would be seen as defined by the interests of funders of the travelling project and the museum's agenda, as these are described in Chapter Two.

In the structure of *MoW*, seeking to meet the general expectations and interests of the institution and the project funders meant that prioritising attracting high numbers of local participants to events and visitors to the *MoW* pavilion, took prevalence over engaging with the long-term needs and difficult memory related to collective memory about Jews on vernacular level. This is not to say that these were not addressed, but that the modes in which they could have been addressed were constrained by the disproportionate levels of responsibility assigned to local activists and POLIN's staff in the collaborative making of *MoW*. Furthermore, focusing on 'quantitative success' inhibited a more multidimensional engagement with the social relevance to the development of communities and individuals through projects such as *Museum on Wheels*. In Chapter Five I explored one of the ways in which *MoW* as a new museology outreach initiative can be grasped beyond its 'quantitative success': I highlighted the role of local activists in the project and how they were included (or excluded) at various stages from shaping the visit of *MoW* and its subsequent impact.

My interest stretches beyond many of the existing studies of participation which focus on institutions' engagement with audiences, for example through the collaborative design of exhibitions (see for instance: Harrison 2005; Knudsen 2016; Nielsen 2015). By directing attention to local activists of the *MoW* project, I offer a different lens through which outreach projects within new museology, as multifaceted and complex programs involving numerous actors, interests, agendas and various types of mobilities, can be understood. I showed that, although *MoW* claimed to be working with local activists and supporting them in their work and development, the structure of the project put significant restrictions on how these

collaborations could develop. As a consequence, local activists were at the core of the collaborative process, but when and how they were included was decided by POLIN's staff. I revealed how the relationship between local activists and *MoW*'s staff imposed certain understandings of POLIN's agenda on the local level. Even though *Museum on Wheels'* aims emphasised education and support for local activists, the overarching agenda of POLIN, where quantitative success was accentuated, emerged as the most powerfully articulated element in *MoW*'s message and the museum's local engagement.

The divergence in needs related to *MoW* was also demonstrated through local accompanying events, which were created and managed by local activists who worked with POLIN to organise the visit of the itinerant museum to their town. The content of some of these events, which I observed in 2015, illustrated the interaction between POLIN's narratives and locals' stories and contributions. Through their ephemeral intervention, POLIN contributed to a step in the process of generating interest in and knowledge about Jews locally. However, in Chapter Five I demonstrated that the ways in which this short-term intervention could contribute to long-term developments, leading towards more inclusive narratives about local past in which difficult memory is integrated, depended on the local activists and the networks and resources they already built or accumulated prior to *MoW*'s visit. Analysing local events, which were mainly the responsibility of local activists working with *MoW,* highlighted the tension between POLIN's story and the tropes prevalent on the vernacular level, related to the preoccupation with Jewish absence. It also showed that one of the reasons for local activists to choose events that would appeal to local audiences was to demonstrate to POLIN that they were able to run events that are considered successful for the museum, because they attract high numbers of participants. From this it might be concluded that in collaborative museum-making a willingness to contribute to advancing POLIN's agenda took prevalence over engaging with the needs and expectations of the local partners.

Altogether, the collaborative process of museum-making in small towns was defined by tensions between interests, needs, expectations and narratives. For POLIN Museum, the core aim was to spread the message of a continuity of Jewish life in Poland, focusing on culture and traditions, as well as to offer short-term support for local activists, and these were elements on which quantifiable evaluations of this outreach project concentrated, for example on POLIN's website as discussed in Chapter Five. I showed that this focus of the museum's overshadowed some of the long-term needs of local activists and that the message POLIN emphasised remained in tension with the preoccupation with Jewish absence in the visited towns.

9.4 Exploring collective memory on the vernacular level

In this thesis, I used the notion of 'memory', and specifically 'collective memory', to explore the interaction between individual and collective levels of the mobilisations of past in the present. In Chapter Three I connected the notion of memory to storytelling specifically and explained how exploring memory-making through stories is a useful approach for this thesis. I focused on the connection between storytelling and memory further in Chapter Seven, and this allowed me to point to how, in this context, agency is shaped by and dependent on interactions involving individuals and institutions. Stories that visitors of *MoW* shared: with me, the educators, or among each other; were a crucial element of the concept of the travelling project. In the ephemeral presence of the pavilion and POLIN's staff in a town or village, locals heard or told stories about Jewish inhabitants who were murdered in the Holocaust; friendships with, hostilities or violence towards, and simply the presence or contributions of, Jews to the development of the local community before the Holocaust. The pavilion offered a space (de Certeau 1988, 177) to open up a local archive of preoccupation with absence.

Following Diana Taylor (2003, 19), the word 'archive' originates from Greek where it signifies "'a public building,' 'a place where records are kept'" as well as the first place, beginning. *MoW* was created to serve as an archive which leads to more discoveries, engagements, storytelling encounters, and events related to the local Polish/Jewish past. Yet, the Polish/Jewish past that POLIN explicitly referred to through the travelling exhibition, is connected to difficult memory about the Holocaust and the behaviour of non-Jewish Poles towards Jewish Poles during and after the Holocaust. This difficult memory is an intrinsic element shaping the vernacular contributions to the collaborative museum-making which shaped *MoW*. In Chapters Seven and Eight I explored how the narratives of visitors, which were told to me or POLIN's educators, were part of the productive reception of *MoW*'s interventions.

The stories told by *MoW* visitors which I analysed in this thesis showed that for the most part, as Joanna Michlic (2006) argues, Jews are the significant other in the narratives defining belonging in Poland. Allosemitic representations and conspiracy theories have sporadically appeared in the Polish public sphere since the post-communist era, and they remained salient as I have been writing over the past few years. For instance, in 2018, in POLIN in Warsaw, a temporary exhibition "Estranged: March '68 and Its Aftermath", curated by Justyna Koszarska-Szulc and Natalia Romik was opened up to visitors (9 March-24 September). I went to see it twice in April 2018. The exhibition put a lot of emphasis on discourse that was used in the antisemitic campaign in 1968 and the same or similar vocabulary, phrases and constructions that were used to refer to Jews and other minorities or refugees before, after, and up until the time of the making of the exhibition. I found the final part of "Estranged" particularly striking, and upsetting, in that context: a number of the images from media, articles, social media posts and letters sent to the Israeli Embassy that

were displayed were abusive, racist, and antisemitic, often calling for physical violence, the return of March '68, or evoking conspiracy theories.

Relating this visual and textual material to the context of the rest of the exhibition, and most importantly, to the discourse used in Polish media, political debates and private or public discussions between the people I observed over the past few years; reminded me that the preoccupation with Jewish absence in Poland that I describe in this thesis is constructed of contradictions and difficulties. Also, it confirmed for me how collective memory about Jews, on the vernacular level is related to negotiations of belonging and constructed through interactions in the political and cultural context. It is likely that the controversy over the re-apponitment of Dariusz Stola as the Director of POLIN Museum is also influenced by the content and reactions that the exhibition about 1968 provoked in Poland, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Seven, by exploring how belonging to local community was negotiated by two interviewees I talked to in 2015, I demonstrated how productive reception is a process connected to visitors' background, expectations, identities, the context of the situation and the context of culture (Ben-Amos 1993). Collective memory about Jews was constructed in the analysed stories through negotiations of belonging to the town in which the interviewees lived. The tropes of allosemitism and nostalgia appeared as prevalent in the vocabulary that was used by the interviewees to define themselves as part of their local communities, but they were also essential for indicating the inclusions or exclusions of Jews into or from local memoryscapes. The complex dynamics of inclusions and exclusions in narratives evoked in the context of *MoW* in rural memoryscapes reveal how the Holocaust, and the behaviours of non-Jewish Poles towards Jewish Poles during and after the Holocaust, remained at the core of the preoccupation with Jewish absence. This, as mentioned already, stood in tension with

POLIN's emphasis on continuity and Jewish culture and traditions in the messages promoted by *MoW*.

However, this thesis also showed that if the stories about Righteous Poles or Gentiles helping Jews during WW2 and the Holocaust in Poland are considered, then the tension appeared to be resolved by addressing the topic in the accompanying exhibition (Chapter Eight). Namely, the museum presented itself as a responsive institution which engages with locals' need to connect the narratives about Righteous with those about Jews, and for locals the trope of Righteous Defence seemed to be significant for helping them to build a positive self-image and to define their belonging locally and in a wider national cultural context. In interactions between locals and the museum analysed in Chapter Eight, recalling the trope often connected to the allosemitic depictions of Jews. Nonetheless, examining how the museum treated the accompanying exhibition "They risked their lives. Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust" and analysing how visitors used stories about the Righteous to negotiate not only their own belonging, but that of Jews, who were in many cases deprived of agency and depicted through an allosemitic lens, showed that the resolution of the tension was only illusory.

In the long-term, the itinerant project's focus remained on POLIN's story of life and continuity, and the exhibition on the Righteous was presented as just one of the additional events: the messages this additional exhibition contributed to the collaborative museum-making were downplayed, while building a responsive brand of a museum took prevalence. The museum did not use the opportunity that the additional exhibition provided, as it was more directly linked to the local preoccupation with Jewish absence and the Holocaust than the exhibition in the pavilion did, to engage in more depth with the collective memory about Jews on the vernacular level.

Considering difficult memory about Jewish/Polish past, one of the dangers involved in celebrating non-Jewish sacrifice and righteousness without providing a broader context, could be that it provides a narrative to employ in collaboratively avoiding challenging questions about difficult memory of hostile and violent behaviours towards Jews during the Holocaust. As Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski (2016, 10) wrote, the key and most challenging, difficult encounter in Polish/Jewish (rural) memoryscapes in Poland is grappling with the position of non-Jewish majority towards Jewish Poles during the Holocaust and after. This difficulty is situated in the cultural context of Jewish absence in (rural) Poland and prevalent allosemitism in public life, where Jews are set apart as the defining other. In the interactions analysed, allosemitism, but also nostalgia as Chapter Seven illustrated, not only provided a vocabulary with which to negotiate the inclusion and exclusion of Jews into and from local memoryscapes but were also used by the interviewees to define their belonging and construct a positive image of themselves and their communities.

9.5 Wider implications for understanding collaboration

Museum on Wheels claimed to bring together the story and aims of POLIN Museum, regarding collective memory about Jews in Poland, with the needs and interests of locals involved in protecting local Jewish heritage. Yet, *MoW*'s agenda was shaped by multiple factors: competition on the market of cultural institutions (Kidd 2014, 8), interests of national and local political actors, requirements of the project funders, and POLIN's employees' understanding of 'outreach' as crucial for the museum's engagement with the society. On the other hand, the local visits of *MoW* were shaped by the needs and motivations of activists for engaging with Jewish past, as well as the knowledge, skills and resources available to them in exploring the neglected Jewish absence. Organizing a visit of *Museum on Wheels* was one element of the ongoing long-term work and engagement of local activists and inhabitants.

This thesis demonstrated that in the collaborative making of *MoW,* the contributions of locals, were insufficiently acknowledged and incorporated by the museum to the structure of the itinerant project. Furthermore, by prioritising its own agenda and aims, POLIN Museum granted less attention to the long-term needs of visitors and local activists than some of them would have expected. To take these conclusions more broadly, the analysis of *MoW* demonstrated how in collaborative museum-making the position of a museum with more resources may translate to more power in deciding about the shape of the project, while the expectations and needs of other partners could be overshadowed and given secondary importance in the structure of the collaboration. These findings can provide a starting point to examine other itinerant projects of museums and cultural institutions: how are needs and expectations of the institution's partners addressed? How does the project structure facilitate or hinder recognising and including the perspectives and expectations of the involved partners? Who is not included and why? These are just some questions that might be explored in relation to travelling museums and outreach projects more broadly.

Although there is no particular model for empowering and successful collaborations (Harrison 2005, 210; Maloney and Hill 2016, 247), some elements of effective collaborations have been identified by researchers (for example: Boast 2011; Maloney and Hill 2016; Silverman and Bartley 2013), and the analysis of *MoW* in this thesis confirms these findings and expands them. Here I discuss the two most relevant elements of effective collaborations. For instance, Maloney and Hill (2016, 247) argue that it is vital that partners understand each other's goals, agendas, interests and needs. This thesis showed that even if such an understanding is attempted and all partners are included in the process of planning and arranging the project to at least some degree, it does not necessarily result in an effective and empowering collaboration. In the case of *MoW*, the museum still upheld most decisive power because of its various resources and capitals, while the local partners' contributions to the

project were valued only as far as they advanced the museum's goals and agendas. Thus, this thesis revealed that an in-depth analysis of collaborative projects is necessary in order to make conclusions about the functioning of the relationship and the contributions of the partners.

It might have seemed from how the project is presented in the media, evaluated in Museum's publications, funders' reports and promoted by the museum's staff, that *MoW* included all the interests, needs and goals of its local partners (local activists). However, the examination of the local partners' perspective in this thesis demonstrated that their needs can be quite different than how the institution depicts them, at least in their long-term reach as opposed to the museum's focus on ephemerality (Chapter Six). On the other hand, the thesis demonstrated that even the agenda of the museum itself, with its emphasis on spreading a message about Jewish culture, life and continuity in Poland, might have overshadowed a deeper engagement with the needs of locals for whom Jewish/Polish memory is defined by preoccupation with Jewish absence in the towns and villages where they live.

This is vital to mention here because POLIN Museum promotes itself as an institution guided by new museology (Vergo 1989), which seeks to be socially relevant (Woodward 2012), and its mission is: "to recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews, contributing to the mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world" ("Mission and Vision" n.d.). Yet, there are multiple ways in which Polish/Jewish past can be "recalled and preserved" and in collaborative projects like *MoW,* this thesis showed, all partners involved should take part in defining the social relevance of the institution's particular project. For *MoW,* the insufficient acknowledgement of how local visitors and activists define the relevance of the itinerant project in relation to their needs and interests meant that the museum's perspective took prevalence. Furthermore, *MoW* is a project that evoked difficult memory, and engaging with difficulty in order to

provide a transformative experience for visitors requires a recognition of a range of ways in which visitors and other actors may respond to the museum's project.

Coming back to elements of successful collaborations, another one which is worth addressing in relation to *MoW* is the importance of focusing on the evolving relationship and the experience of each partner (Silverman and Bartley 2013). For Fern Silverman and Bradford Bartley (2013, 156–57) all partners should feel valued and everyone involved should be adjusting in the process to respond to the needs of the other partners as they are gradually learning more about them in the process. Although I agree with these authors that acknowledging the learning process and adjusting to it might be crucial, the analysis of *MoW* in this thesis showed that it is precisely because relationships between partners in collaborative projects can evolve across timeframes and structures, more attention needs to be paid the diverse ways and frameworks which shape collaborations that museums get involved in. In other words, collaborations are not only long-term projects where partners have time and multiple opportunities to learn about each other throughout the months or years that the partnership evolves, but collaborations may also be short-term like *MoW* where for every three-day visit to a town there was one or two local activists who worked with POLIN on shaping the visit. Thus, further studies of museums' collaborations which involve different partners in various locations, such as itinerant exhibitions or other travelling projects, could provide a better understanding not only of how complex collaborations can be, but they could also help museums to prepare for the challenges they may face while running outreach projects in which various partners are to be involved.

9.6 Overall conclusion

This thesis is a qualitative study of *Museum on Wheels* and the interactions evoked in the context of this itinerant project. The research design was inspired by multi-sited ethnography which allows the exploration of "a multiplicity of sites, flows and circulations" (Berg 2008).

My approach was informed by social constructivist ontology and epistemology and so consequentially I embraced relativism and subjectivism as my perspectives in this study. This means I see knowledge as constructed through experiences and interactions (relativism) and I am aware of the role of my own background and position in the study I conducted (subjectivism). The social constructivist viewpoint influenced my choices in the process of data gathering and subsequent analysis because I treated ethnography as a key way to learn about the phenomena under investigation and grounded theory as the most suitable way to examine the data because it is a method which is inductive, built on iteration and comparisons (Charmaz 2011, 361) and it acknowledges that the research process itself is "a social construction" (Charmaz 2008, 403). My approach had various limitations and biases on which I reflected in Chapter Four. However, here I want to come back to where my contribution is situated ontologically and epistemologically and reiterate how this makes my thesis an original contribution to knowledge.

My study is a contribution to a growing field of sociological and anthropological research in memory studies which treats memory as emerging in social interactions (see for instance Gensburger 2016) and incorporating ethnographic methods such as interviews and participant observation is, as I showed in this thesis, vital for understanding these social interactions. Much of the research done by memory scholars focuses on cultural productions, such as museum exhibitions, leaflets, brochures or websites, but this does not suffice for making claims about how collective memory is constructed (Kansteiner 2002). This thesis contributes to identifying further ways to understand collective memory, proposing to examine it on the vernacular level. It demonstrated how collective memory can be researched comprehensively: by focusing not only on the products and how they are situated in broader local, national or international contexts, but also on how individuals interact with these products.

In the literature I used from museum studies (for example: Falk and Dierking 2016; Macdonald 2009; Morse, Macpherson and Robinson 2013; Simon 2010), ethnographic approaches are often used as a method, but their ontological and epistemological stance is frequently participatory: reality is subjective-objective, knowing is practical, and findings are co-created (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba 2011, 100). In the participatory framework, researchers develop their projects together with the museum's employees or partners and the research process often unfolds in a collaborative manner. For this thesis, social constructivist ontology and epistemology which was not participatory, proved to be the most suitable framework. Although I worked for and with the museum for certain periods of time, as explained in the Preface and Chapter Four, this PhD was not developed collaboratively with POLIN. This allowed me to go beyond the quantitative evaluation methods upon which the museum largely relies. Namely, surveys, questionnaires, visitors' and participants' numbers are used by POLIN to understand how an outreach project functioned and was received, as explained throughout this thesis. Instead, relying on a qualitative set of methods: semi-structured interviews, observations, analysis of the discourse offered in textual materials, speeches, performances et cetera, offered me an opportunity to explore the complexity of the relations and narratives shaping *Museum on Wheels* in greater depth.

Using qualitative methodology to gather and analyse data allowed me to understand not only how the museum's structure and agenda set the framework for this travelling project, but also how the needs, expectations and contributions of locals who interacted with this museum shaped it. This thesis, therefore, provides a unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge on museums' engagement with communities, and my choice of methodology was a crucial element in making this contribution possible. My study sheds new light on how museums' public engagement and outreach projects can be analysed. It brings into question the reliance on quantitative methods for analysing museums' work and advocates for more

in-depth, qualitative studies. Incorporating more qualitative methodologies into museums' evaluation strategies can advance the understanding of museum's social relevance and demonstrate the intrinsic, but often underacknowledged, complexity of collaboration in the museum sector.

Relying on a broad range of data analysed qualitatively, this thesis offered original insights into the collaborative-making of a travelling museum project with its multiple actors and their interests. It also brought together museum studies and memory studies and demonstrated how memory mobilisations in everyday and informal contexts can be analysed vis-à-vis institutionalised projects. To my knowledge, very few studies of travelling museums on difficult memory exist to date. This thesis addressed this gap not only by demonstrating how such projects can be investigated, but also by revealing that a more comprehensive understanding of how various actors engage in collaborations with museums can lead to enhancing the social relevance of museums' work. Furthermore, by analysing collective memory about Polish/Jewish past on the vernacular level, and consequentially the Holocaust, it unravelled the complexity of the collective memory dynamics in post-communist Poland. Finally, it opened doors in terms of rethinking how museums educate the public about difficult topics, such as the Holocaust, by highlighting the interactive role of the educational process and arguing for more attention to the members of the public who participate in it.

APPENDICES

Appendix One: Interview Guides

Below are the guide questions used in semi-structured interviews conducted with educators, visitors and local activists. The questions were modified for group leaders, teachers or participants of local events I talked to (using the visitors questions guide as a framework) and for POLIN's staff (using the local activists questions guide as a framework).

Educators

1. Introduce yourself and explain why you decided to work as an educator for *MoW.* Have you worked for POLIN before?
2. What were your expectations related to working in this town with *MoW?*
3. Describe briefly the age groups and types of visitors who came to the *MoW* pavilion in this town.
   - How long were they usually staying?
   - What were they interested in?
   - Where do the visitors take their knowledge about Jews and local Jewish history from?
   - Were they from the town or were they visitors from elsewhere?
   - How did the visitors treat you?
4. What was most difficult for you in working in this town?
5. What was the most surprising?
6. What are you most happy about?
7. How did the workshops that you led go?
   - Do you think the workshop was suitable for the group that took part?
   - How did the participants engage, how did the workshop impact them?
8. What do you think about the accompanying events?
9. How well did the collaboration with the local coordinator work for you?

Visitors

1. How did you find out about *MoW*?
2. Why did you come?
3. What is this exhibition/project about in your opinion?
4. Did you learn something new through it?
5. What attracted your attention most, what moved you and why? What will you remember most?
6. Knowledge about Jews and local Jewish history: how do you get it yourself?
   - What do people here/ in Poland say about Jews? Why?
   - What should be known/said about Jews?
7. What did you like most in *MoW* and what did you like least? What would you do differently?
8. Do you think it can have any long-term effects?
9. Do you know similar projects (to *MoW)*?

Local activists (working as local coordinators)

1. Introduce yourself and explain why you decided to work as a coordinator for *MoW*.
2. What were the most difficult elements and moments in preparing the project? Where did you get help from (locally and wider)?
3. How did you decide about choosing the local accompanying events and why did you want to organise these particular ones?
4. What were your expectations and worries related to the visit of *MoW* and the accompanying events?
5. What are you most happy about in relation to *MoW*?
6. What was the most surprising?
7. What did you find most difficult when *MoW* was already in your town?
8. What could have been done differently or better in your opinion?
9. How did the inhabitants react to *MoW* before it came and when it was in the town?
10. Who was interested in getting involved in preparing the visit of *MoW*, take part in the project or visit the exhibition? Why?
11. What do people know about Jewish history locally?
    - Who is interested in it and why?
    - Do you think that the project can increase the interest in local Jewish history locally? How?
12. Do you think it will have any long-term effects?
13. How would you like to continue working together with POLIN Museum in the future? (if at all)
14. What did this project mean for you personally? What will you remember most and what would you rather forget?

Appendix Two: List of interviewees

The interviewees were divided into five age categories: 18-30, 31-45, 46-64, 65-80 and 80+; and into four general categories: POLIN's staff (educators, full-time coordinators, other staff), local activists (individuals who coordinated *MoW*'s stay in collaboration with POLIN, supporting staff from local institutions or organisations, invited lecturers or workshop convenors or facilitators or other activities), teachers or group leaders (accompanying school groups or other types of organised groups, usually formed of children or young people, when visiting *MoW* or participating in workshops), individual visitors (adults who visited the *MoW* pavilion or participated in activities run as part of the museum's visit). Below, I provide a list of interviewees with their gender, dates and location of the interviews and the age category they belonged into. In total, the list consists of 28 interviewees, out of which 10 are male and 18 are female.

POLIN's staff

	Identifying name	**gender**	**location**	**date**	**age category**
1.	Educator A	Male	Radzyń Podlaski	02.10.2016	18-30
2.	Educator B	Female	Przeworsk	14.09.2016	31-45
3.	Educator C	Female	Koźminek	25.05.2015	31-45
4.	Educator D	Female	Namysłów	07.06.2015	18-30
5.	Educator E	Female	Pińczów	01.07.2015	31-45
6.	Educator F	Female	Żarki	19.06.2015	31-45
7.	*MoW* coordinator	Female	Warsaw	13.03.2017	31-45
8.	Dariusz Stola	Male	Warsaw	31.01.2017	46-64

Local activists

	Identifying name	**gender**	**location**	**date**	**age category**
1.	Interviewee I	Female	Żarki	19.06.2015	31-45
2.	Interviewee J	Female	Koźminek	26.05.2015	31-45
3.	Interviewee U	Female	Pińczów	01.07.2015	31-45
4.	Interviewee S	Female	Koźminek	26.05.2015	31-45
5.	Interviewee T	Female	Białowieża	30.09.2017	31-45

6.	Interviewee W	Female	Żarki	19.06.2015	31-45

Teachers/group leaders

	Identifying name	**gender**	**location**	**date**	**age category**
1.	Interviewee D	Male	Przeworsk	13.09.2016	46-64
2.	Interviewee E	Female	Przeworsk	13.09.2016	31-45
3.	Interviewee G	Female	Namysłów	07.06.2015	31-45
4.	Interviewee P	Female	Żarki	19.06.2015	31-45
5.	Interviewee Y	Male	Pińczów	01.07.2015	31-45

Individual visitors

	Identifying name	**gender**	**location**	**date**	**age category**
1.	Interviewee A	Male	Koźminek	24.05.2015	46-64
2.	Interviewee B	Female	Żarki	19.06.2015	65-80
3.	Interviewee C	Female	Żarki	18.06.2015	65-80
4.	Interviewee F	Male	Przeworsk	12.09.2016	46-64
5.	Interviewee H	Male	Namysłów	05.06.2015	46-64
6.	Interviewee N	Male	Przeworsk	13.09.2016	65-80
7.	Interviewee O	Male	Koźminek	24.05.2015	46-64
8.	Interviewee Z	Male	Żarki	17.06.2015	46-64
9.	Interviewee X	Female	Koźminek	24.05.2015	31-45

Appendix Three: Educational workshops and other events offered by POLIN as part of *MoW* in 2015 and 2016

2015

In 2015 the local activists who worked for POLIN as local coordinators could choose from four workshops that the educators from POLIN would lead: "We are building a Shtetl" for participants up to 9 years of age, "Learning about the Jewish world" for participants above the age of 9, "Jewish women" for participants above 13, and for above 16-year-olds, "Approaches of Poles [towards Jews] during the Holocaust". The only workshop that was prepared especially for *MoW* was "Jewish women", the other ones were adapted from the educational offer of POLIN Museum in Warsaw.

Local coordinators were responsible for arranging the logistics for the workshop and finding locals who would attend, and often the attendees were school groups, at least in 2015. Then, local coordinators could decide which other elements of *MoW*'s offer they would like to add to the visit's program. These elements included the exhibition "They risked their lives (...)"; a selection of films that could be screened during the *MoW*'s visit (such as *Ida* 2013 of Paweł Pawlikowski, *Cud purymowy* (Purim miracle) 2000 by Izabella Cywińska, *Ocaleni* (Saved) 2013 by Joanna Król and Karolina Dzięciołowska); and a selection of "Jewish games" (such as dreidel) which could be used during "The Evening of Games" run by POLIN's educators (Kubica 2015).

2016

In 2015 the local activists who worked for POLIN as local coordinators could choose from four workshops that the educators from POLIN would lead: "Learning about the Jewish world" for participants above the age of 11, "Jewish women" for participants above 13, "Approaches of Poles [towards Jews] during the Holocaust" for above 16-year-olds and

"Anti-discrimination workshop" for participants above 13. As in 2015, the only workshop that was prepared especially for *MoW* was "Jewish women", but the "Anti-discrimination workshop" was also tailored for *MoW* and there was no script that the educators would follow*:* it was conducted only by educators who had experience running similar workshops and could adapt it to suit the needs of a particular group. A script for this workshop was created only in 2018. Local coordinators were responsible for arranging the logistics for the workshops and finding locals who would attend. In 2016 there were no film screenings nor "Jewish games" available in the additional programme offered by the POLIN Museum, yet the exhibition "They risked their lives (...)" was brought with *MoW* (All the information about 2016 was supplied by one of the *MoW* coordinators working at POLIN via email.)

Similarly to 2015, the local coordinators were responsible for arranging the logistics of the workshop and finding locals who would attend. Then, local coordinators could also decide whether the exhibition "They risked their lives (...)" would be shown in their town and most of them were willing to host it. There was no additional offer provided by POLIN Museum that year (games, films).

Appendix Four: Small towns studied in this thesis – background

In the scope of this thesis it would not be possible to qualitatively analyse in-depth all of the interviews and observations I collected in all of the 19 towns I visited during my fieldwork research of the itinerant museum in 2015 and 2016. Therefore, I selected the six towns I focus on in my analysis: most of the interviews quoted in the thesis were conducted in these towns, and the local events accompanying *MoW* that I examine in-depth in Chapter Six took place in two of these six. However, I use the observations as well as interviews conducted throughout the whole fieldwork to supplement this analysis and arrive at a more general understanding of the processes and interactions shaping collaborative museum-making occurring in the context of *MoW*'s interventions in rural Poland. The relevant characteristics of the six towns selected can be found below. Five of these towns were visited during 2015 fieldwork (Koźminek, Łazy, Namysłów, Pińczów and Żarki), and one of them in 2016 (Przeworsk). These six towns are located in different parts of Poland, though none are in the North of the country;[98] as the map (Figure 16) shows.

My decision to analyse the data gathered in these six towns specifically was motivated by my experience in these places and the data itself. While preparing for and conducting fieldwork, I did not make any decisions as to what would be included, rather, my choices were the result of the process of transcribing, translating and coding the data, from which the selection appeared. I wanted to include towns from various regions, of various sizes in terms of current population, with different sizes of Jewish populations historically, and with diverse levels of engagement of locals with Jewish heritage in the period since the end of the communist period in Poland. In the data gathered from the six towns eventually chosen I found illustrative examples for more general findings: regarding local events,

[98]I did not include any of the towns from the Northern regions because when I was conducting fieldwork there in 2015 I was still in the process of obtaining ethics approvals to collect interview data. In 2016 when I visited two towns in the North I did not conduct interviews with visitors there, focusing instead on local events and activists.

involvement of activists, and stories in which locals negotiated belonging and constructed Polish/Jewish memory.

Figure 16: A map of Poland showing Warsaw, where POLIN Museum is located, and the towns described in this section. The map was downloaded from Wikimedia Commons (NordNordWest 2009) and towns were marked by the author.

Koźminek

The population of the Koźminek village is around 2,000, and the Koźminek municipality has around 7,500 inhabitants (polskawliczbach.pl 2017b). Jews had lived in Koźminek since the 15th century, and in the 16th century the village was one of the regional centres of the Reformation movement. Until the 1940s Koźminek had a significant Jewish (20 percent) and German Evangelical (15 percent) population ("Zagłada Żydów w Koźminku" n.d.; Gmina

Koźminek n.d.). Since the late 1940s there have been no more Jews nor Evangelical Christians living in the village, where most of the population is Roman Catholic. The material heritage of these minority communities was either destroyed during or after WW2, and the remaining parts of their buildings were either built into new constructions, often houses, or neglected and left unattended as the structures slowly fell into decay (such as the case of the village's Evangelical church and cemetery). According to the local activists who worked as local coordinators of *MoW*, the visit of POLIN's initiative created the first public opportunity to address the loss of the Koźminek's Jewish community and raise the issue of the cultural, religious and national diversity of the local population in the last more broadly.[99]

Figure 17: *MoW* setting up in Koźminek in May 2015. Photo taken by Justyna Milkas and added to the *Museum on Wheels* Facebook page.

[99]The process of exploring and articulating the complexities of the local past publicly began, following the accounts of the inhabitants, a few years before *Museum on Wheels* visited. The first event that is mentioned in informal conversations with town's governor and local coordinators of *MoW* is a short collection of oral history interviews conducted by young people, entitled "Get your grandparents to tell you a story" (*Namów dziadków na opowieść*), which was published in 2014 by Koźminek's public library. A majority of the stories focused on Catholic Poles, but local Jews and Germans, who lived in the town during the childhood and young adulthood of many of the interviewees, were also mentioned in some of the stories.

Figure 18: The elevated platform of *MoW* and the market square of Koźminek, May 2015. Photo taken by Justyna Miklas, used with the permission of the author.

Figure 19: *MoW* pavilion on the market square in Koźminek, May 2015. Photo taken by Justyna Miklas, used with the permission of the author.

Łazy

Łazy is a town of 7,000 inhabitants located in Southern Poland (polskawliczbach.pl 2017c), 30 km south of another town visited by *MoW* and analysed in this thesis, Żarki. The first mention of Jews living in Łazy can be dated to 1790, and by 1925, the 230 Jews living in Łazy constituted 15 percent of its inhabitants (Marczewski n.d. a.). During the Holocaust, the Jews of Łazy were moved to ghettos in the area and then taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau camp (Marczewski n.d.a.). Currently, like in almost all other small towns visited by *Museum on Wheels*, there are no Jews in Łazy. In the description of local history on the official municipality website there is no mention of Jews (Urząd Miejski w Łazach 2013). There are no material remnants of former Jewish presence in the local urban landscape; but a few local activists cultivate interest in the pre-1939 past, one of which collects oral history interviews from the oldest generation of inhabitants (born in the 1930s or earlier). In the stories she collects there are many references to the Jewish inhabitants of Łazy, and the visit of *MoW* was an opportunity for this activist to share some of her video recordings with the local audience.

Figure 20: A pedestrian street in Łazy, June 2015. The pavilion of *MoW* is behind the fountain and the local library is in the background. Photo taken by Alicja Szulc for the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Downloaded from the Facebook page of *MoW* and used with the permission of the museum.

Figure 21: The centre of Łazy, 2014. Photo taken by Patryk Drabek for naszemiasto, pl. Used with author's permission.

Namysłów

Namysłów is a town located in South-Western Poland in the historical region of Lower Silesia; and has a population of 16,200 ("Namysłów" n.d.). The first mention of Jews living in Namysłów date back to the early 14th century, but only at the end of the 18th century did the Jewish population begin to gradually increase. In the 19th century it reached above 200, which constituted close to six percent of the population at the time. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries most Namysłów Jews emigrated to the West of Prussia and further (Marczewski n.d. b.). The vast majority of the town's current inhabitants do not have roots in Namysłów reaching back farther than the 1940s: the town was part of the 'Recovered territories', and as the local German-speaking population was moved to the West after WW2, the inhabitants of pre-war Polish borderlands, which are now part of Ukraine and Belarus, were brought to towns like Namysłów. In this context, the heritage of the Jewish community is treated as an element of Prussian/German heritage in Namysłów. From the material remnants, only the territory of the Jewish cemetery is still preserved but without any matzevot (Wirtualny Sztetl 2018a).

Figure 22: Market square in Namysłów, June 2015. The back side of the *MoW* pavilion on the right.

Figure 23: *MoW* pavilion on the market square of Namysłów, June 2015.

Pińczów

Pińczów is a town in Southern Poland with 11,000 inhabitants (polskawliczbach.pl 2017a) which *MoW* visited it in June 2015. Jews lived in Pińczów since the 14th or 16th century (Wirtualny Sztetl 2018c), and at the end of the 18th century the Jewish population formed 60 percent of the total population of the town (Wirtualny Sztetl 2018b). In 1921, over 4,324 of Pińczów's 7,749 inhabitants were Jewish, of which 1,927 identified themselves of Jewish nationality, while the rest saw themselves as Poles, as indicated in the brochure that was distributed to visitors of the *MoW* pavilion ("Muzeum Na Kółkach w Pińczowie." 2015). During WW2 much of the town was burnt and destroyed by Nazi occupiers, killing many of its inhabitants. Additionally, in October 1942, the local Jews who were still in Pińczów were taken to Treblinka ("Muzeum Na Kółkach w Pińczowie." 2015). The material heritage of the local Jewish population was in most part destroyed, either by the Nazis or by Poles after WW2: for example, on one of the two Jewish cemeteries in the town, temporary housing buildings and a carpentry workshop were erected in the 1950s (Wirtualny Sztetl 2018d). However, the Renaissance synagogue built in the late 16th and early 17th centuries in Pińczów was not destroyed, and in 1997 and 2005 conservation works were carried out to preserve the historical value of the building (Jewish Heritage Report 1998; World Monuments Fund 2017), but much more needs to be done. The Regional Museum in Pińczów and a local school are involved in educational programmes related to Jewish history in Poland and they are trying to collect further funds to restore the synagogue.

Figure 24: Pińczów synagogue, July 2006. Photo taken by Jakub Hałun. Downloaded from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pinczow_synagogue_20060722_1514.jpg on 9.6.2018. Used under the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Figure 25: Pińczów. View from Mount St. Anne, centre of town, July 2006. Photo taken by Jakub Hałun. Downloaded from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Pińczów#/media/File:Pinczow_20060722_1438.jpg on 9.6.2018. Used under the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

Żarki

Żarki is a small town of 4,500 inhabitants (polskawliczbach.pl 2017e), located in Southern Poland, which *MoW* visited in June 2015. Jews had lived in Żarki since the 16th century, and the Jewish community was of a significant size prior to the Holocaust: in 1921 the Jewish population of the town was equal to 57 percent of the total number of inhabitants (Wirtualny Sztetl 2015). Since 1945 no or almost no Jews have lived there. The centuries-long presence of Jews is mentioned in official narratives of the local history – municipality websites, brochures, boards with tourist information placed in the central squares and so on. The local activists who worked as local coordinators of *MoW* in Żarki were knowledgeable about the local Jewish/Polish history, and in their eyes the material remnants connected to the Jewish community in their town have a potential cultural value. In Żarki much effort has been placed on raising funds and restoring the synagogue, which is now used as a community cultural house, taking care of the Jewish cemeteries, and preparing a trail leading through the local Jewish heritage sites. Employees of the local public institutions (town hall, culture house, schools) take pride in promoting the Jewish heritage of the town.

Figure 26: Synagogue in Żarki converted into a community cultural centre, June 2015.

Figure 27: Local Jewish cemetery in Żarki, June 2015.

Figure 28: Market square in Żarki, June 2015.

Przeworsk

Przeworsk is a town of 15,600 inhabitants located in South-Eastern Poland (polskawliczbach.pl 2017d). *MoW* visited the town in September 2016. Jews lived in Przeworsk since the 16th century and in the 19th century they constituted between 30 and 45 percent of the total population ("Przeworsk Historia" n.d.). Currently there are no Jews living in Przeworsk. The buildings belonging to the Jewish community were destroyed or reconstructed to be used for other purposes. The Jewish cemetery was devastated during WW2 and there were no matzevot remaining on its territory after the war. The cemetery was closed in the 1960s and in 1969 the local bus station was built on it. The site is commemorated with a small, inconspicuous memorial stone erected in the early 1990s by a local activist. It reads: *Pamięci Żydów pomordowanych w r. 1939-1944 przez hitlerowców* (To the memory of the Jews murdered in the years 1939-1944 by Hitler's Nazis). The last line, presumably indicating place and date, is illegible. According to local activists, from time to time the schools, museums and cultural institutions in the town run events and activities related to Judaism and local Jewish history. In the neighbouring town of Markowa during the Holocaust a family of eight that gave shelter to two Jewish families (another eight people) was denounced and shot together with the Jews whom they were helping. In March 2016, the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in WW2 was opened and inhabitants of Przeworsk mention Markowa often when talking about the local Jewish heritage and memory of local Jews. In another neighbouring town, Kańczuga, after WW2 in 1945, at least 13 Jews were killed by unknown perpetrators (Lipiński 2002), but almost no-one talks about this story in Przeworsk.

Figure 29: Market square area in Przeworsk, September 2016.

Figure 30: The memorial stone on the site of the Jewish cemetery in Przeworsk, September 2016.

Figure 31: The *MoW* pavilion on a carpark in Przeworsk, September 2016.

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